NATION

HC discharges 4 accused in 2006 Malegaon blast case

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BUSINESS

Bear drags markets down 1% on IT sell-off, oil surge

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SPORTS

Former champions MI, CSK seek consistency in IPL clash

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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In litmus test, TN & Bengal head to polls

EC seizes items worth ₹ 1,262 cr in TN; DMK eyes 2nd term

CHENNAI, 22 APRIL

Seizures have crossed Rs 1,000 crore as Tamil Nadu heads to Assembly polling on 23 April, with the Election Commission (EC) cracking down on inducements and tightening security across the state.

Chief Electoral Officer Archana Patnaik said items worth Rs 1,262 crore — including cash, gold, liquor and drugs — have been seized so far. Of this, Rs 543 crore in cash was detected during vehicle checks. Authorities have registered 163 FIRs for poll-related violations, while the social media monitoring cell has facilitated the removal of 2,180 URLs across platforms.

Over 5.73 crore voters, including 2.93 crore women, 2.83 crore men and 7,728 third-gender electors, are eligible to vote. The rolls include 14.59 lakh first-time voters. A total of 4,023 candidates are in the fray across 234 constituencies.

The contest is centred on the Dravidian majors, with the DMK-led alliance seeking to retain power and the AIADMK-led front attempting a comeback after five years in opposition. Chief Minister M K Stalin has promised to transform Tamil Nadu into a model state, while AIADMK leader Edappadi K Palaniswami has appealed for a decisive mandate.

This election is a key test for DMK Chief MK Stalin, AIADMK leader Edappadi K Palaniswami and TVK founder Vijay—*x*

Actor-politician Vijay, contesting from Perambur and Tiruchirappalli East in his electoral debut, has also sharpened the campaign rhetoric.

Polling will be conducted at 75,064 stations across 33,133 locations, equipped with over 1.06 lakh ballot units along with control units and VVPATs. Inclusive measures include 325 all-women booths, 71 managed by persons with disabilities, 29 youth-run stations and pilot green booths.

Polling will be conducted at 75,064 stations

Security deployment is extensive, with 300 companies of Central Armed Police Forces and more than 1.4 lakh police personnel on duty. EVMs are being moved to polling centres, and sensitive booths will have additional protection. Campaigners from outside constituencies have been asked to leave.

Mobile phones are barred inside polling booths, with collection facilities provided outside. The EC has warned of strict action, including criminal cases and possible repolling, against any attempt to tamper with EVMs or commotions from the BJP.

He later clarified that he did not mean it in a literal sense, saying Modi was "terrorising" political parties.

Earlier in the day, a BJP delegation led by Union ministers Nirmala Sitharaman, Kiren Rijiju and Arjun Ram Meghwal met the Election Commission, seeking strict action against Kharge. —*PTI*

WB SIR: 27L to miss voting as EC tribunal adds just 136 names

KOLKATA, 22 APRIL

The Election Commission (EC) added only 136 voters to West Bengal's electoral rolls in a supplementary list after their appeals were accepted by the appellate tribunal. However around 27 lakh appeals by voters whose names were deleted from rolls are still pending as Bengal heads to polls on Thursday, Aaj Tak Bangla reported.

Polling in the first phase will cover 152 of the state's 294 seats, including all 54 in north Bengal's eight districts, along with parts of Murshidabad, Nadia, Birbhum and Hooghly.

For the BJP, the phase is crucial to retaining its north Bengal base, which powered its rise in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. TMC, meanwhile, is attempting to claw back ground.

The EC has deployed 2,450 companies of central forces, and directed candidates not to leave their constituencies from 6am on polling day until voting concludes.

The Chief Electoral Officer directed police to take immediate preventive action against people allegedly involved in voter intimidation and shared a list of alleged "troublemakers" across several Assembly constituencies for action.

However, Calcutta High Court stayed the order.

TMC Chief Mamata Banerjee aims to keep Suvendu Adhikari-led BJP at bay, while Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury seeks to make gains for Cong —*x*

> **Around 2 lakh central force personnel have been brought into Bengal for the elections. This is unprecedented. Are they trying to intimidate me by deploying so many forces. I want to see who has more power— the armoured vehicles or the people**
>
> —Mamata Banerjee, WB CM

TMC says BJP using 'spl trains' to get voters from Surat

Adding to the tensions, the TMC has formally complained to the EC alleging that the BJP arranged "special trains" from Surat in Gujarat to ferry voters to West Bengal. In a letter to the Chief Electoral Officer, the party cited videos circulating online showing groups of passengers being seen off by BJP workers amid slogans such as "Jai Shri Ram" and "Bharat Mata Ki Jai". TMC alleged that providing free travel amounts to "bribery" and a "corrupt practice" under election law, and argued that the Indian Railways, being under the Centre, cannot be used directly or indirectly for partisan electoral purposes. It has sought immediate intervention by the EC. —*PTI*

Polling will be conducted at 44,376 stations

Didi walking into IPAC ED raid is peril for democracy: SC

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Supreme Court of India on Wednesday sharply criticised the alleged obstruction by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during an Enforcement Directorate raid, warning that such intervention "puts democracy in peril". A bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and N V Anjaria said the issue was not a Centre-state dispute but an individual act jeopardising the system. The court was hearing the ED's plea alleging obstruction during its 8 January search at Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC) in Kolkata in a money-laundering probe. Senior advocate Menaka Guruswamy argued it was a Centre-state issue. The bench noted reliance on the Kesavananda Bharati judgment on the Constitution's basic structure —*PTI*

>>>MORE ON PAGES 4 & 5

SSLC results today; marks not grades for third language

BENGALURU, 22 APRIL

School Education Minister Madhu Bangarappa said SSLC (Class 10) results will be declared on 23 April, a day ahead of schedule. He confirmed that, following a Karnataka High Court order, students will be awarded marks, not grades, for third language papers. Exams were held from 18 March to 2 April. The court refused to review its 15 April directive to evaluate papers un-der existing rules, after a petition by three students. The government had proposed a grading system for third languages, reducing total marks from 625 to 525, citing student difficulty, particularly with Hindi, and demands from Kannada activists.—*PTI*

Sena MLA beats leopard during rescue

MUMBAI, 22 APRIL

Animal rights organisations have sought action against Shiv Sena MLA Chandrakant Patil after a viral video purportedly showed him and others beating a female leopard during a rescue operation in Jalgaon district. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals India (PETA India), Compassion Unlimited Plus Action (CUPA), Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre (WRRC) and the Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations (FIAPO) on Wednesday wrote to Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, who heads the Shiv Sena, and demanded action against the MLA. The organisations demanded authorities take action under The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and other relevant laws. —*PTI*

TEHRAN/NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Iran's Revolutionary Guards on Wednesday attacked and seized two cargo vessels, including one bound for Gujarat, in the Strait of Hormuz, heightening tensions in a critical global ship-ping corridor.

The Panama-flagged MSC Francesca and Liberia-flagged Epaminodes were taken into Iranian custody, while a third ship, the Greek-owned Euphoria, was targeted and left stranded along Iran's coast, according to state media.

Maritime data showed Epaminodes was headed from Dubai to Mundra port. Iran's navy claimed the vessels lacked "required authorisation" and had "manipulated navigation systems", posing risks to maritime safety. Iranian media described the action as "lawful enforcement", alleging the ships ignored warnings and crossed a "red line".

The UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) said Iranian forces fired on three ships about 15 nautical miles northeast of Oman. No injuries were reported, though Epaminodes suffered major bridge damage and Francesca sustained hull damage.

The incident comes amid heightened regional tensions following US and Israeli strikes on Iran in February, and a fragile ceasefire recently extended by US President Donald Trump. More than 30 shipping incidents have been reported in the region since then.

Separately, India denied making any payments — in cash or cryptocurrency — to Iran to secure safe passage through the Strait. The clarification followed an April 18 incident in which two Indian vessels turned back after coming under fire.An audio clip from the tanker Sanmar Herald captured its captain pleading with Iranian forces to cease firing despite prior clearance. Reports have also flagged a suspected crypto scam offering fake transit permit to shipowners. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pages 6 & 7

US woman drugged, raped in Kodagu homestay

KODAGU, 22 APRIL

A US national has been allegedly sexually assaulted by a staffer of a homestay in a village here, police said on Wednesday.

The incident occurred a week ago at a home stay in Kutta village. The staff, a native of Jharkhand, who worked in the hospitality section of the homestay has been arrested in connection with the incident.

The owner of the homestay has also been arrested for failing to inform the police about the incident after the woman complained about the alleged sexual assault, a senior police officer said.

The woman alleged that her drink was spiked and then she was sexually assaulted by the homestay staff, the police further said.

Later, when she approached the homestay owner about the assault, he allegedly tried to suppress it and disconnected WiFi services for three days, preventing her from contacting anyone.

After regaining access, she allegedly left the premises under the pretext of traveling to Mysuru. Instead, she approached US embassy officials who then facilitated communication with local authorities.

Based on her complaint, a case of sexual assault was registered and all due procedures were followed. The accused have been arrested and sent to judicial custody, Bindu Mani R N, Superintendent of Police (Kodagu) said.

State Home Minister G Parameshwara said that further action will be taken as per law. He said such incidents send a poor message about the state or society. —*Salar News*

>>>More on Pages 5

EC issues 'stern notice' to Kharge for calling PM 'terrorist'

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

The Election Commission on Wednesday issued a "stern notice" to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge for referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a "terrorist", asking him to explain his remarks within 24 hours.

The poll panel said it had taken "serious note" of the comment, made a day before polling in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Kharge, addressing a press conference in Chennai, had criticised the AIADMK's alliance with the BJP and questioned how a party rooted in the ideologies of Periyar and C N Annadurai could align with Modi. In the course of his remarks, he referred to the prime minister as a "terrorist", triggering sharp reac-

- Congress alleged that EC's notice to Kharge is evidence that it is functioning as an attached office of the Union home ministry, and its behaviour is an assault on the Constitution.

Get out: Woman to M'rashtra minister over traffic snarl

MUMBAI, 22 APRIL

Traffic chaos during the BJP's demonstration over the women's reservation bill in Mumbai's Worli area prompted an irate woman to confront Maharashtra minister Girish Mahajan, blaming him for the snarls.

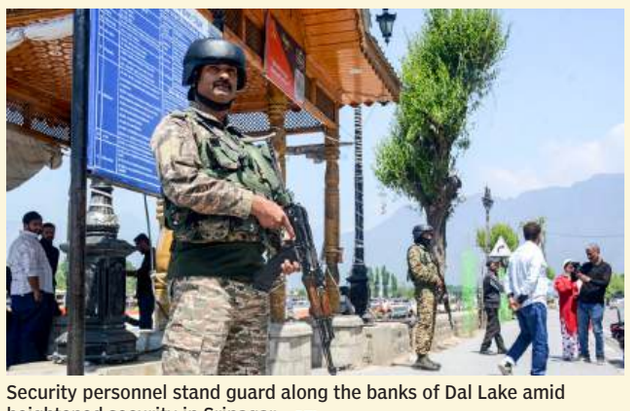
The incident occurred on Tuesday when Mahajan was addressing reporters at the rally, organised to target Opposition parties over the defeat of the Constitution Amendment Bill,.

The episode, captured on video, quickly gained traction online, amplifying criticism of the BJP's protest tactics.

The agitated woman confronted the minister, shouting at him for blocking roads and causing inconvenience to commuters. Meanwhile, the police have registered a case against the organisers of the BJP event for alleged violation of norms. Police had given permission for Tuesday's Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam Rally but there was a violation of certain norms, said an official. Mahajan said that the woman was in a hurry to pick up her child and her anger was justifiable to an extent, but she used inappropriate language. —*PTI*

TOURISTS BEGIN TO RETURN

One year on, Pahalgam picks up pieces after terror attack



Security personnel stand guard along the banks of Dal Lake amid heightened security in Srinagar —*PTI*

PAHALGAM, 22 APRIL

It was a day of remembrance and quiet resilience as 26 families marked the first anniversary of the Pahalgam terror attack, even as tourists cautiously returned to the Valley.

On this day last year, three Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists opened fire on visitors at Baisaran meadow, killing 25 tourists and a pony handler in one of the deadliest attacks in recent years. The assault triggered a four-day military confrontation with Pakistan after India launched Operation Sindoor on 7 May, targeting terror infrastructure across the border.

> **Even after a year, Centre failed to bring perpetrators of the Pahalgam attack to book. When will the mastermind of the attack Sajid Jutt be hanged?** —Mahesh Tapase, NCP (SP) leader

Baisaran, a scenic grassland often dubbed "mini Switzerland", remains closed, though nearby areas have reopened following security reviews. Tourist activity is gradually picking up, with visible security presence across key destinations.

For the families, however, the grief remains undiminished. Priyadarshini Satpathy, from Odisha's Balasore district, lost her husband Prashant Kumar Satpathy in the attack. She said the trauma continues to haunt her, adding that assurances of government support, including a job and assistance for her children's education, are yet to be fulfilled. In Karnal, Rajesh Narwal said his family is still struggling to come to terms with the loss of his son Vinay Narwal, a 26-year-old naval officer. At a memorial in Pahalgam town, tourists paused to pay their respects before continuing their visits. Many described the Valley as safe and emphasised the importance of supporting its tourism-dependent economy.

Yet, recovery remains uneven. While footfall has improved, livelihoods have taken a hit. Pony operators and vendors, who once earned up to Rs 1,800 a day, now report incomes dropping to around Rs 200 as key attractions remain restricted. —*PTI*

— PTI

Kolar: 10 bonded labourers rescued from brick kiln

KOLAR, 22 APRIL

Ten labourers from Odisha, including two children, who were allegedly held captive at a brick factory in Malur taluk and receiving sub-standard wages were rescued by the Kolar district administration. Officlas led by Kolar Assistant Commissioner Jambagi Renuka Prasad conducted a raid on a brick factory situated at Ramenahalli on Monday and rescued the labourers. The labourers said that they were given salaries on weekends, but were not allowed to leave. They had complained to authorities. The rescued labourers have been housed in the hostel attached to the Social Welfare department and will be sent back to their native place pending approval. A case has been registered against owner Mohammed Ibrahim Khan. —*SALAR NEWS*

Two killed in multi-vehicle crash in Belagavi

BENGALUR, 22 APRIL

Two people were killed, and three others sustained serious injuries in a multi-vehicle collision in Belagavi district on Tuesday evening, police said. According to police, the incident occurred on the Jath–Jamboti State Highway in Mudalagi Taluk. The deceased, Ramappa Pavadi Mang, the driver of the car and a resident of Devapurhalli, and Shivbasu Ganapati Chougala from Kankanwadi. Police said the accident occurred when a car heading towards Mudalagi collided head-on with another pick-up vehicle from the opposite direction. Following the impact, the car also crashed into a motorcycle parked on the roadside, resulting in a chain collision. The pickup driver and another occupant sustained minor injuries. A case has been registered at Mudalagi Police Station.—*PTI*

Anti-SIR protest to be held in Bengaluru today

BENGALURU, 22 APRIL

A protest against the Special Intensive Revision of Electoral rolls (SIR) will be held at Freedom Park, Bengaluru, at 10.30am on Thursday. The convention will feature Sheikh Faridul Islam from "Vote Adhikar Manch," representing the half-crore disenfranchised voters in West Bengal, a release from organisers B Sripad Bhat, JM Veerasangiah, KL Ashok said. The convention, which seeks to ensure that the SIR is not conducted in Karnataka, will also see the participation of leaders from various progressive organisations, secular parties, prominent thinkers, and activists from the State. —*SALAR NEWS*

Student wings unite to seek college union polls

Govt to follow Lyngdoh Committee norms

Ministers MC Sudhakar and Dr Sharanprakash R Patil during a meeting with student union leaders at the State Higher Education Council, on Wednesday —*x*

BENGALURU, 22 APRIL

Student wings across political boundaries are unanimously demanding that student union elections be reinstated in colleges from the current academic year, according to a statement on Wednesday.

The consensus emerged at a day-long meeting of student union leaders convened at the State Higher Education Council auditorium with Medical Education Minister Dr Sharanprakash R Patil and Higher Education Minister Dr MC Sudhakar, the statement said. Student wings of the Congress, BJP, JD(S), and Left parties welcomed the State government's 2026-27 Budget announcement to revive student elections in colleges.

Aditya N Raj of Vidyarthi JD(S) sought 70 per cent of seats be reserved for Kannada-speaking students, while Student leaders representing Left-affiliated organisations — Lekha Adavi, Veena Naik, Shivappa, and Dodda Basavaraj of SFI, AISF, AIDSO, and AISO — called for structured representation in the elected bodies, demanding reserved seats women candidates.

Similarly, representatives of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), including Gopi Rangaswamy, urged the government to prescribe eligibility criteria such as a minimum attendance threshold of 60 per cent and disqualification of candidates with pending FIRs or academic backlogs. This drew immediate objections from Kirthi Ganesh of NSUI and Vidyarthi JD(S) representatives, who argued that several students may have earned FIRs while participating in demonstrations.

A student from Bangalore Medical College asked the government to clearly define the role, powers and responsibilities of elected student bodies.

"The elected body should not be confined to organising college festivals. Students should be given substantive powers, including the right to participate in the syndicate meetings of their respective universities," the student said.

Patil and Sudhakar said that they would recommend to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah that rules and guidelines be framed at the earliest.

They said that the rules would broadly follow the Lyngdoh Committee Report, which seeks to eliminate "muscle and money power" from college politics.

The committee was constituted by the Supreme Court and headed by former chief election commissioner JM Lyngdoh. —*Salar News*

NIA court sentences 7 in prisons radicalisation case

BENGALURU, 22 APRIL

Seven accused, including mastermind and Lashkar-e-Taiba member T Naseer, have been sentenced to seven-year rigorous imprisonment by a special National Investigation Agency court in the 2023 Bengaluru prisons radicalisation case, an official statement said on Wednesday.

Apart from Naseer, the court has sentenced accused Syed Suhail Khan, Mohammed Umar, Zahid Tabrez, Syed Mudassir Pasha, Mohammed Faisal Rabbani and Salman Khan and imposed a fine of Rs 48,000, it said.

The accused had earlier pleaded guilty of the charges filed by the NIA in the case relating to a Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) linked terror conspiracy hatched inside the Parapanna Agrahara Central Prisons, Bengaluru, allegedly by Naseer. The conspiracy involved identification, recruitment, training, conversion and radicalisation of youth lodged in prison.

The case was initially registered by the Bengaluru Central Crime Branch (CCB) in July 2023 following the seizure of arms, ammunition and digital devices from habitual offenders. The offenders had planned to carry out terror strikes in the City for the LeT, the statement said.

The case was then taken over by NIA, which unveiled a larger conspiracy to facilitate the escape of Naseer, who was an under-trial prisoner in the 2008 Bengaluru serial blast cases at the time.

The NIA had chargesheeted 11 arrested accused and an absconder, Junaid Ahmed. Of these, accused Salman Khan was arrested after he was extradited from Rwanda. Efforts are on to arrest Junaid Ahmed. —*PTI*

Can't even crack jokes now: HM after FIR

BENGALURU, 22 APRIL

A day after a court ordered registering an FIR against him for his statement after a Kabaddi match that he lost Rs 500 bet with the Deputy Commissioner, Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday said, "It seems I cannot crack jokes".

Parameshwara said his utterance during the match was casual and was not meant to promote betting.

"I had said so casually during a Kabaddi match. In the countryside, we speak casually sometimes. Of course, it is wrong in the eyes of the law, but what is important is the context in which I had said that," Parameshwara told reporters in the City. "Had I asked people to bet on the game and promoted betting, that would not be proper."

He said the matter of betting was over once the game was over, but it was raked up after a private individual HR Nagabhushan filed a complaint in the court.

Asked why he didn't explain the context to the court, Parameshwara said that he hadn't received any notice. He reitterated that his remark was made in jest. —*PTI*

Bike Taxi Association asks CM for clarity on norms

Bengaluru, 22 April

The Bike Taxi Welfare Association (BTA) said on Wednesday that it had submitted a formal representation to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, seeking urgent clarity on the future of bike taxi operations in the State.

This comes amid recent reports suggesting that the State government may file a Special Leave Petition against Karnataka High Court order permitting bike taxi operations.

The BTA, said in a statement that such a move would be inconsistent with earlier assurances of a policy-led resolution.

The issue has previously seen engagement at the highest levels, with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi writing to the CM, highlighting that lakhs of drivers went without work for months, urging a timely resolution.

After which, the CM then confirmed that the State was developing a framework aligned with the court's directives.

The BTA emphasised that a majority of bike taxi riders are local Kannadiga youth from modest socio-economic backgrounds, who rely on bike taxis as their primary source of income, and expressed hope that a "forward-looking" decision will be taken. —*PTI*

Ranya Rao may walk out of jail as detention expires

BENGALURU, 22 APRIL

A year after her arrest in a gold smuggling case, Kannada film actress Ranya Rao is set to walk out of Bengaluru Central Jail, DRI sources said on Wednesday.

Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) officials intercepted Harshavardhini Ranya alias Ranya Rao, stepdaughter of the DGP rank (suspended) police officer, Ramachandra Rao, at Kempegowda International Airport on 2 March, 2025. She allegedly carried out 27 trips to Dubai since January 2025.

Officials seized 14.213 kg of smuggled gold bars directly from her and later found cash and jewellery worth over Rs 2 crore at her residence. She was accused of smuggling gold worth Rs 102 crore.

Although she secured bail earlier from the special court for economic offences, her release was blocked by the Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act (COFEPOSA) detention. A source in the DRI said that the one-year preventive detention expired on 22 April, which will allow her release. —*PTI*

WORLD EARTH DAY

To mark World Earth Day, children take part in an awareness campaign called 'Our Power- Our Planet', organised by ACE Foundation in association with the Department of Women and Child Development, at Bal Bhavan Cubbon Park, in Bengaluru on Wednesday - *MOHAMMED ASAD*

As State sizzles, IMD forecasts rain in North Karnataka

BENGALURU, 22 APRIL

With mercury levels shooting up by the day across the State, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast rain in several districts.

Mercury levels had hit 37 °C in several districts, especially northern Karnataka. However, the IMD and the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre said that "thunderstorm accompanied by gusty wind with speed 40-50 kmph likely to occur at isolated places over North Interior Karnataka on 22nd & 23rd April. Thunderstorm accompanied by gusty wind with speed 30-40 kmph likely to occur at isolated places".

All three Bengaluru weather stations on Wednesday - HAL Airport, City, and Kempegowda International Airport - recorded maximum temperatures above normal. HAL Airport and the City station both touched 36.4°C and 36.5°C, respectively, running 2.3°C above normal, while KIAL recorded 36.7°C, up 1.6°C from normal. The IMD forecast clear skies above the City, with maximum temperatures to stay above 37°C.

'Belagavi officer died due to heart attack'

The Health Department on Wednesday said that the government officer who collapsed during stage programme of Basaveshwara Jayanti celebrations in Raibag taluk a day earlier died due to a heart attack, and not a heat stroke. The clarification comes amid reports that at least two officers died due to heat strokes. The deceased, Venkatesh Ballari, 35 was the chief officer of Chinchali Town Panchayat in Raybag taluk. —*SALAR*

KOLAR OPENS HEAT STROKE WARD

In a bid to precent people from falling prey to heat stroke or sun stroke, the Kolar District Health Department has set up an exclusive Heat Stroke Ward at the Government SNR Hospital in Kolar.

The 10-bedded ward will have separate facilities to treat people affected with heat stroke, and will include required facilities including oxygen, and IV fluids, said Dr Jagadish, District Surgeon, SNR Hospital, Kolar. He said that mercury has crossed 36°C in the district, causing health issues among senior citizens, children and pregnant women. —*Salar News*

- *MOHAMMED ASAD*

AMRIT MAHOTSAVA CELEBRATION

Kharge confuses terror with those who fight it: VP

BIDAR, 22 APRIL

Vice President CP Radhakrishnan on Wednesday took a dig at AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge over his remark against PM Narendra Modi, saying the Opposition Leader in the Rajya Sabha "fails to distinguish between terror and those who fight it."

He made the remark during the Amrit Mahotsava (75th birth anniversary) celebration of Dr Basavalinga Pattadevaru Mahaswamiji of Hiremath Samsthan at Sri Channabasavashram in Bhalki, Bidar district.

Kharge, Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot, and Minister Eshwar Khandre were present at the event.

"I had a slight difference with Kharge ji—only a difference in vision. Sometimes, I feel Kharge ji does not differentiate between black and white, between a terrorist and the terror to the terrorist," Radhakrishnan said. His remarks come on the anniversary of the Pahalgam terrorist attack, where at least 26 people were killed.

Vice President CP Radhakrishnann during an Amrit Mahotsava event in Bidar on Wednesday; Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot, AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge, and Minister Eshwar Khandre look on —*x @VPINDIA*

Kharge on Tuesday accused Modi of "terrorising" political parties by misusing government machinery agencies to stifle the Opposition, triggering strong reactions from BJP.

On Wednesday, Kharge reiterated that he has already clarified his remarks – and that he didn't call the PM a "terrorist" as has been alleged.

Radhakrishnan also said Bidar holds historical significance awith 12th-century social reformer Basavanna, who opposed social discrimination and worked towards an egalitarian society.

"It is in this sacred land of Kalyana that Basavanna conducted the Anubhava Mandapa, considered the world's first spiritual forum. Its ideals continue to inspire generations, and this land remains blessed by his revolutionary vision," he said.

Radhakrishnan also paid tributes to Basavalinga Pattadevaru.

He added that religious centres can become powerful agents of transformation.

Meanwhile, at the event, Kharge said that man is not born for the sake of religion; rather, religions are created for the welfare of human beings."Unless we say that we are all one, no religion can grow," he added.

He warned that Buddhism, once widespread in India, now faces challenges here. Basavanna's teachings should not meet the same fate. —*PTI*

Man sets wife ablaze for wearing nightie at home

BELAGAVI, 22 APRIL

- Krishna Patil allegedly objected to his wife wearing a nightdress at home and frequently argued with her over the issue, police said.

Krishna Patil, 34, has been arrested for allegedly setting his wife ablaze at their residence in Nandgad village of Khanapur taluk on Tuesday night following an altercation regarding his wife wearing a nightdress at home, rather than a sari, police said on Wednesday.

Krishna allegedly objected to his wife Manjula Patil, 32, wearing a nightdress at home and frequently argued with her over the issue, police said.

An altercation broke out between the couple during which the accused allegedly doused her in kerosene and set her on fire.

Manjula sustained around 80 per cent burn injuries on her body and was admitted to the Belagavi Institute of Medical Sciences.

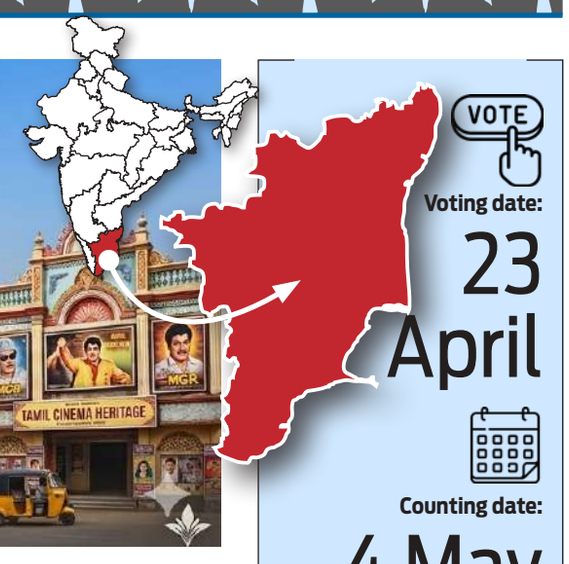
However, due to the severity of her injuries, she has been shifted to a hospital in Goa for advanced treatment, a senior police officer said.

A case has been registered at Nandgad Police Station and the accused has been arrested.

Further investigation is underway, Nandgad police said. —*PTI*

DMK's fortress faces a BJP AND VIJAY TEST

Tamil Nadu's Dravidian identity is set to be tested as parties square off in a tense election



Voting date: 23 April

Counting date: 4 May

SEATS IN FOCUS

KOLATHUR

Kolathur is Chief Minister MK Stalin's seat since 2011 and he has won from here three times. Located near Perambur, Kolathur faces typical urban issues such as flooding and summer water shortages. Stalin has projected Kolathur as a "model constituency" under the Dravidian governance model, showcasing flood control projects and welfare schemes like Mudhalvar Padaippagam. This seat is seen as a direct test of Stalin's leadership with AIADMK's P Santhana Krishnan and TVK's VS Babu challenging him. With a diverse urban electorate, the seat is a key indicator of Chennai's political mood.

MK STALIN

Age:	72
Party:	DMK
Edu:	BA (History)
Criminal cases:	47
Assets:	Rs 6.26 cr

P SANTHANA KRISHNAN

Age:	51
Party:	AIADMK
Edu:	ITI
Criminal cases:	Nil
Assets:	Rs 17.48 lakh

CHEPAUK-THIRUVALLIKENI

Stalin's son and DyCM Udhayanidhi Stalin is seeking a re-election from here. Located in central Chennai, the seat includes major landmarks such as Marina Beach, and MA Chidambaram Stadium. It has a rich political history, as former DMK leader M Karunanidhi, represented this seat in 1996, 2001 and 2006. DMK has won 10 of the last 11 elections from here. In 2021, Udhayanidhi secured his debut victory by 69,355 votes. This election is a triangular contest. AIADMK's Adhi Rajaram and TVK's D Selvam are giving the DMK scion a good fight.

UDHAYANIDHI STALIN

Age:	48
Party:	DMK
Edu:	Graduate
Criminal cases:	22
Assets:	Rs 20.64 cr

ADHI RAJARAM

Age:	67
Party:	AIADMK
Edu:	LLB
Criminal cases:	Nil
Assets:	Rs 5 cr

MYLAPORE

Mylapore is one of Chennai's oldest neighbourhoods and is linked to the legend of St Thomas, one of the 12 apostles of Jesus Christ. DMK has fielded incumbent MLA Velu Dha, BJP has nominated Tamilisai Soundararajan, NTK has fielded Arun RL, while TVK has nominated Venkataramanan P. BJP's choice of Tamilisai, a former governor, signals its push in urban Tamil Nadu. The result will test the appeal of Hindutva politics in a Dravidian stronghold with a diverse social blend. As one of the oldest urban settlements in South India, candidates often need to establish cultural credibility to connect with voters.

VELU DHA

Age:	55
Party:	DMK
Edu:	Graduate
Criminal cases:	NIL
Assets:	Rs 1.5 cr

TAMILISAI SOUNDARARAJAN

Age:	64
Party:	BJP
Edu:	MBBS
Criminal cases:	Nil
Assets:	Rs 21.5 cr

PERAMBUR

Perambur has become the launchpad for actor-turned-politician Vijay and his party TVK and is one of two seats from which he is making his electoral debut. The seat has traditionally been a stronghold of DMK. Vijay is taking on sitting DMK MLA RD Shekar, who won in 2021 by over 50,000 votes. Perambur has the highest number of voters in Chennai at 2,22,792. The constituency is socially diverse, with Hindus, including Vanniyars and Adi Tamilars, as well as Christians and Muslims. The murder of BSP leader K Armstrong in nearby Sembium in 2025 has also heightened political tensions in the area.

RD SHEKAR

Age:	59
Party:	DMK
Edu:	BCom
Criminal cases:	4
Assets:	Rs 90L

C JOSEPH VIJAY

Age:	51
Party:	TVK
Edu:	12th pass
Criminal cases:	2
Assets:	Rs 404 cr

TIRUCHIRAPPALLI EAST

This is another seat from where Vijay is contesting. Tiruchirappalli East has about 35 per cent Christian and Muslim voters. In 2021, the DMK candidate S Inigo Irudayaraj defeated his rival by around 53,000 votes. He has strong support among Christian voters. The AIADMK has fielded newcomer Rajasekaran. Vijay's entry has changed the political equation. By contesting from this DMK strongholds, Vijay has directly challenged the ruling party. Many voters from here are also reportedly unhappy with both DMK and AIADMK.

C JOSEPH VIJAY

Age:	51
Party:	TVK
Edu:	12th pass
Criminal cases:	2
Assets:	Rs 404 cr

S INIGO IRUDAYARAJ

Age:	53
Party:	DMK
Edu:	PhD
Criminal cases:	5
Assets:	Rs 62.41 cr

TAMILNADU

Total seats: 234 seats

Majority mark: 118 seats

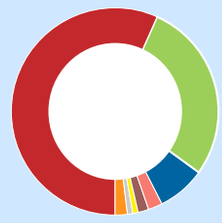
Total candidates: 4,023

Total voters: 5.67 crore

ALLIANCES AND PARTIES

- **INDIA:** DMK, Cong, VCK, DMDK and CPI/CPI(M).
- **NDA:** AIADMK, BJP, PMK, AMMK
- TVK
- NTK

2021 RESULTS



DMK	133
AIADMK	66
Cong	18
PMK	5
VCK	4
CPI(M)	2
CPI	2
BJP	4

DMK VS CENTRE

The DMK-led Tamil Nadu government is often at loggerheads with the BJP-led Centre, with the party accusing the Centre of undermining state autonomy. A major point of contention is delimitation. Chief Minister MK Stalin has warned that a population-based redistribution of parliamentary seats could reduce representation for southern states. He argues the South is being "punished" for effective population control. Calling it a "black law," Stalin has led statewide protests. The biggest flashpoint is the language issue. The DMK strongly opposes the three-language formula, accusing the Centre of imposing Hindi. The Centre has also withheld 2,152 crore in education funds, while the DMK refuses to implement the policy. Other key issues include the demand for NEET exemption, with the DMK arguing the exam disadvantages Tamil Nadu students. The party has also accused Governors of acting as "parallel governments" in non-BJP ruled states, calling it a "mockery of the Constitution." The DMK has even taken Governor RN Ravi to the Supreme Court over delays in approving bills.

MANY PROMISES MADE BUT WILL THEY BE KEPT?

A LOOK AT WHAT PARTY MANIFESTOES PROMISE:

DMK

- Welfare coupons of Rs 8,000 for homemakers
- Increasing monthly aid for women from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000.
- Free breakfast for students up to Class 8. This was Initially launched for students in Class 1 to 5.
- Construct 10 lakh new houses, introduction of 10,000 new buses.
- Creating 50 lakh new jobs and attracting ₹18 lakh crore in investments.
- Give 15 lakh laptops to high school students.

AIADMK

- Monthly aid of ₹2,000 to women heads of households.
- ₹10,000 one-time grant to every household if AIADMK comes into power.
- 3 free LPG cylinders annually for each household.
- To provide a subsidy of ₹25,000 to eligible women to buy e-scooters.
- To make Tamil Nadu a 'ganja-free' state.

TVK

- ₹2,500 monthly aid for female heads of families.
- 6 free cooking gas cylinders per year for every household.
- 200 units of free power for all households.
- 8g of gold and a silk saree for brides from poor families.
- A baby welcome kit including a gold ring for every newborn.
- ₹4,000 per month for unemployed graduates (aged 29+) and ₹2,500 for diploma holders.

FAMILY FIRST, PLEASE

A LOOK AT THE DOMINANCE OF DYNASTIC POLITICS

DR PON GAUTHAM SIGAMANI
Son of K Ponmudy, former higher education minister
PARTY: DMK
SEAT: TIRUKKOYILUR

Pon Gautham Sigamani was elected to Lok Sabha from Kallakurichi in in 2019 on a DMK ticket. His father, K Ponmudy, quit the Cabinet after controversial remarks on Hindu symbols and was removed as DMK Deputy General Secretary. Sigamani has also faced legal scrutiny. The ED filed a chargesheet against him in August 2023 in a money laundering case linked to illegal red sand quarrying between 2007 and 2010. In July 2024, the ED attached properties worth about Rs 14.21 crore linked to his relatives and his wife. Tirukkoyilur has a voter base dominated by Vanniyars and Scheduled Castes.

TRB RAJAA
Son of veteran leader and MLA TR Baalu
PARTY: DMK
SEAT: MANNARGUDI

Rajaa, 49, is Tamil Nadu's Minister for Industries, Investment Promotion and Commerce. A three-time MLA from Mannargudi (2011, 2016, 2021), he is the son of a former Union minister and a close aide of late CM M Karunanidhi. He served as the first Secretary of the DMK's NRI Wing (2021–2022) and became Secretary of its IT Wing in January 2022. He was also a member of the Tamil Nadu State Planning Commission (2021–2023) and chaired the Assembly's Estimates Committee.
Mannargudi, in Thiruvarur's Cauvery delta, is a DMK-AIADMK stronghold with Vanniyar, Mukkulathor and SC populations.

KARTHIK MOHAN
Son of MK Mohan, MLA
PARTY: DMK
SEAT: VILLIVAKKAM

Karthik is the son of one of the wealthiest politicians in Chennai with significant declared assets. Karthik is associated with G Square Realtors. Reports in 2023 said he was a shareholder in the firm, which has faced scrutiny and Income Tax raids. In April 2023, IT officials searched his residence in connection with the G Square probe. In the 2021 Assembly election, the DMK's A Vetriazhagan won Villivakkam with 76,127 votes. AIADMK's JCD Prabhakar was runner-up with 38,890 votes. In the current contest, He is up against AIADMK's SR Vijayakumar and TVK's Aadhav Arjuna. NTK's Roshini is also in the fray.

VIJAY: THE THIRD FRONT

Two years after announcing his exit from a flourishing acting career. Vijay launched Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), and positioned himself as a third front in the state's long-dominant Dravidian political landscape. Unlike most new parties, TVK is taking a bold approach by contesting all 234 seats independently, with no alliances. Vijay is said to have rejected the BJP when it allegedly offered him the CM post.

Party structure
TVK follows a 60:40 candidate model, 60% grassroots workers and 40% newcomers or prominent external figures. Ideologically, it is secular and Centre-Left, drawing inspiration from Periyar, Kamaraj, and Ambedkar. Even if TVK doesn't win, he is likely to split the vote.

Support base
Vijay's strongest appeal is among young voters, driven by his film-star popularity and image as a "change" figure after decades of DMK–AIADMK dominance. This is significant given TN's large youth electorate:
- 14.59 lakh first-time voters (18–19)
- 1.07 crore voters (20–29)
- 1.16 crore voters (30–39)

The stampede
In September 2025, a rally in Karur ended in tragedy when a stampede killed 40 people. This triggered criticism of TVK's readiness.

Battle for identity, power, and survival in BENGAL

West Bengal is all set for an intense electoral battle between the TMC and the BJP

VOTE

Voting date:
23, 29 April

Counting date:
4 May

WEST BENGAL

Total seats:
294 seats

Majority mark:
148 seats

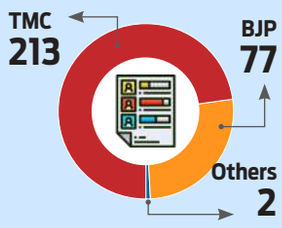
Total candidates:
2,920

Total voters:
6.82 cr

ALLIANCES AND PARTIES

- TMC,
- Left: CPI(M), CPI, AIFB, RSP, CPI(ML)
- BJP, AJSU
- Cong
- AIMIM
- AJUP

2021 RESULTS



SEATS IN FOCUS

NANDIGRAM

Nandigram is represented by Suvendu Adhikari, a two-time BJP MLA and a key face of the party in Bengal, widely seen as a potential CM candidate. In 2021, he won 49% of the vote and defeated Mamata Banerjee. The TMC has fielded Pabitra Kar, an ex-BJP member who was once close to Adhikari, and who joined the party just a few hours before his candidature was announced. The TMC is keen to win the seat, with Abhishek Banerjee personally tracking developments. Although Muslims are about 25% of Nandigram's population, they accounted for 95.5% of deletions in SIR.

SUVENDU ADHIKARI

Age:	55
Party:	BJP
Edu:	MA
Criminal cases:	29
Assets:	Rs 85.87 lakh

PABITRA KAR

Age:	43
Party:	TMC
Edu:	Graduate
Criminal cases:	4
Assets:	Rs 15 lakh

BHABANIPUR

Bhabanipur has been a TMC stronghold since 2011, represented by CM Mamata Banerjee. In 2021, after losing Nandigram, she needed a seat to remain CM. The sitting TMC MLA vacated, enabling a bypoll which Mamata won. This time, Bhabanipur is among the most closely watched contests as BJP has pitted Suvendu Adhikari against her again. The seat is cosmopolitan. Bengali Hindus are around 42%, non-Bengali Hindus around 34%, and Muslims 24%. This makes it a test of TMC's urban strength. Around 40% of the voters deleted here during SIR here were Muslims.

MAMATA BANERJEE

Age:	71
Party:	TMC
Edu:	LLB & MA
Criminal cases:	0
Assets:	Rs 15.37 lakh

SUVENDU ADHIKARI

Age:	55
Party:	BJP
Edu:	MA
Criminal cases:	29
Assets:	Rs 85.87 lakh

MURSHIDABAD

Unlike many parts of Bengal which witnesses a direct TMC vs BJP fight, Murshidabad has long been a Congress stronghold. Shaoni Singha Roy won here in 2011 and 2016 on a Congress ticket. The party lost the seat in 2021 when BJP's Gouri Shankar Ghosh won. Roy then shifted to the TMC and is contesting again, and he is expected to challenge Ghosh. The Congress has fielded Siddiqi Ali. The seat also saw the highest voter deletions of around 7.49 lakh. With a 70 per cent Muslim population, it remains a key test of the TMC's support base among minorities.

SHAONI SINGHA ROY

Age:	53
Party:	TMC
Edu:	Graduate
Criminal cases:	0
Assets:	Rs 2.8 cr

GOURI SHANKAR GHOSH

Age:	53
Party:	BJP
Edu:	MA
Criminal cases:	5
Assets:	Rs 64 lakh

KHARAGPUR SADAR

Kharagpur Sadar will see a high-profile contest between two leaders known as 'Dada' — BJP's Dilip Ghosh and TMC's Pradeep Sarkar. The seat has swung between parties. Ghosh broke a seven-term Congress run in 2016. In 2021, BJP's Hiran Chatterjee won from here, defeating Sarkar in a close fight. Ghosh is now trying to reclaim the seat, while Sarkar remains a strong contender. A major railway hub, the constituency has a diverse mix of Telugus, Marathis and Tamilians. Local matters like pollution, unemployment and water shortage are the main issues here.

DILIP GHOSH

Age:	61
Party:	BJP
Edu:	10th pass
Criminal cases:	27
Assets:	Rs 2 cr

PRADEEP SARKAR

Age:	54
Party:	TMC
Edu:	Graduate
Criminal cases:	0
Assets:	Rs 1 cr

PANIHATI

Panihati has shifted from a TMC stronghold to one of the state's most biggest battlegrounds with the BJP fielding Ratna Debnath, mother of the RG Kar Hospital rape and murder victim. She is going after the TMC for "backing" her daughter's rapists. Ratna was assaulted by women after she announced her candidature. TMC has nominated Tirthankar Ghosh, son of five-time MLA Nirmal Ghosh. Although the TMC secured nearly 50% votes in the 2024 LS polls, the RG Kar incident has shifted focus. With a largely Hindu electorate, the seat is a key battleground in North 24 Parganas.

RATNA DEBNATH

Age:	54 years
Party:	BJP
Edu:	Graduate
Criminal cases:	0
Assets:	Rs 19 lakh

TIRTHANKAR GHOSH

Age:	39
Party:	TMC
Edu:	Graduate
Criminal cases:	Nil
Assets:	Rs 10.22 lakh

KEY PROMISES MADE, BUT WILL THEY BE KEPT?

A LOOK AT WHAT PARTY MANIFESTOES PROMISE:

TMC

- Monthly aid for women increased to Rs 1,500 for general category and Rs 1,700 for the reserved categories.
- Rs 1,500 monthly aid for the unemployed aged between 21-40.

- Permanent concrete houses for every family.
- Rs 30,000 crore farm budget.
- To create 7 new districts & expand urban local bodies for better civic services.

BJP

- Implement the Uniform Civil Code.
- Strict measures against illegal immigration
- Curb cattle smuggling.
- Enact law to ensure freedom of religion.

- Rs 3,000 monthly aid for women.
- Special women's police battalion; 33% job quota for women.
- Jobs for 10 million; Rs 3,000 aid till employment.

CONGRESS

- Free education for women up to post-graduation with a monthly aid of Rs 2,000.
- Free of cost travel in government transport for women.
- Filling of all vacant government posts within a year.
- Rs 15,000 annual aid for marginal and landless farmers.
- Universal health cover of Rs 10 lakh for every family in WB.

LEFT FRONT

- One permanent job in every family.
- At least two job interview opportunities for every registered unemployed youth.
- Free electricity up to 100 units for eligible households with 50% subsidy on electricity charges up to 200 units.
- Emphasis on empowerment policies for women and creation of self-help groups.
- Filling of all vacant government posts within the next five years.
- Regular recruitment through the West Bengal PSC, School Service Commission and College Service Commission.

FISHY POLITICS

BJP MP Anurag Thakur relishes fish and rice during a West Bengal campaign, while Medinapur TMC MLA Sujoy Hazra holds up a large fish during his outreach

FAMILY FIRST, PLEASE

A LOOK AT THE DOMINANCE OF DYNASTIC POLITICS ACROSS PARTY LINES

DIVYENDU ADHIKARI
Brother of Suvendu Adhikari, BJP MLA and the Leader of the Opposition in Assembly
Party: BJP
Seat: Egra

Dibyendu has held several key positions in West Bengal politics, serving as an MP from Tamluk between 2016 and 2024, a seat earlier represented by Suvendu. Before that, he was the MLA from Kanthi Dakshin from 2009 to 2016, a constituency that has also been represented by his father and brother, underscoring the family's political influence in the region. A long-time member of the TMC, he joined the BJP in 2024, after his family moved away from Mamata Banerjee. Egra, a general category Assembly constituency in East Medinipur district, is a predominantly rural seat.

SUBHASISH DAS
Son of Dulal Chandra Das, TMC MLA and brother-in-law of Sovan Chatterjee, the former mayor of Kolkata.
Party: TMC
Seat: Maheshtala

Maheshtala, a general Assembly seat in South 24 Parganas, was a CPI(M) stronghold for decades before the TMC took control in 2011, and has retained it since, despite the BJP's growing presence. While Das has served as a councillor and local party observer, critics argue his nomination is a prime example of the "politics of pedigree" rising in Bengal, where influential families occupy key electoral slots. His candidacy has led to local political slogans like "Das durg noy, Maheshtala sobar" (Maheshtala is for everyone, not just a Das fortress).

ABHIJEET GHATAK
Brother of Malay Ghatak, West Bengal Minister
Party: TMC
Seat: Kulti

Kulti is a general category Assembly seat in Paschim Bardhaman district. The constituency has a mixed political background, with no single party able to establish a firm hold here. The BJP however, maintains an upper hand over the TMC in this urban seat, considering its performance in the LS elections.

THE FIGHT FOR MUSLIM VOTES

Muslims make up about 33% of West Bengal's population and are central to TMC's dominance in 40 to 45 of the 294 Assembly seats.
Before the elections, expelled TMC leader Humayun Kabir emerged as a disruptor of this base. He was suspended on 4 December 2025, for anti-party activities after calling for the construction of a "Babri Masjid" replica in Murshidabad on 6 December. He later launched his own outfit, the Aam Janata Unnayan Party (AJUP), to mobilise Muslims. Kabir claims he can consolidate up to 80% of the vote, while the TMC has dismissed his campaign as "masjid politics" that could split the secular vote and benefit the BJP. In March 2026, Kabir's party briefly allied with Owaisi's AIMIM, but the tie-up ended on 10 April. On 9 April, the TMC released a video showing Kabir discussing a deal involving Rs 1,000 crore and a Deputy CM post with the BJP to divide Muslim votes. Kabir called the clip AI-generated. The TMC claimed the video linked him to Amit Shah, Himanta, Suvendu Adhikari and even the PMO.

THE FISHING POINT

Fish has become a flashpoint this time. Mamata Banerjee said that the BJP would ban the consumption of fish and meat if voted to power. The BJP rejected this and said that it will not interfere with people's food habits. Amit Shah said the "consumption of fish and eggs will not be stopped."
TMC has called the election a fight to protect "Bangla asmita," invoking the slogan "Maache Bhaate Bangali" (Bengalis swear by fish and rice). BJP candidates are campaigning holding Catla fish during rallies to counter this allegation of the TMC.

Kerala declares Thrissur blast state-specific

THRISSUR, 22 APRIL

The Kerala government has declared the fireworks factory explosion in Mundathicode, Thrissur, a 'state-specific disaster'. The Tuesday tragedy has claimed at least 13 lives. Addressing a press conference on Wednesday, Kerala Revenue Minister K Rajan said the decision was taken in a special online cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. He announced that Rs14 lakh financial assistance will be provided to the dependents of those killed. He said Cabinet will cover all medical expenses for the injured for next six months. A judicial inquity has been ordered.—*PTI*

In Uttarakhand, Kedarnath Dham portals open

DEHRADUN, 22 APRIL

Amid vedic chants and traditional rituals, the Kedarnath Dham portals were opened for devotees at 8AM on Wednesday in Rudraprayag District, Uttarakhand. Thousands of pilgrims gathered at the Himalayan shrine to witness the ceremony amid chanting of "Har Har Mahadev". Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami attended the ceremony and performed the first 'puja'. Dhami also reviewed the ongoing pilgrimage arrangements. The portals of Shri Badrinath Dham will open at 6.15 AM on Thursday (23 April). The shrines of Yamunotri and Gangotri had already opened for the season on Sunday (19 April).—*PTI*

Anjel Chakma's father accuses police of apathy

DEHRADUN, 22 APRIL

The father of Anjel Chakma, 24, a student from Tripura killed in an alleged racially motivated assault, has accused Uttarakhand Police of negligence and claimed the main accused remains at large due to administrative failure. Tarun Prasad Chakma, a BSF head constable, alleged police were "colluding" with the accused, and said an FIR was registered only after a Member of Parliament intervened. Four months after Anjel's death, prime suspect Yagyaraj Awasthi of Kanchanpur in Nepal, is at large, having allegedly crossed the border after the incident. Anjel was attacked on 9 December and died in hospital on 26 December 2025.—*PTI*

BALLOT BUZZ

TVK accused of online campaign in poll silent period

AIADMK alleges DMK distributed money

CHENNAI/COIMBATORE, 22 APRIL

Complaints over alleged poll violations intensified in Tamil Nadu on Wednesday, with demands for Election Commission intervention in both an alleged online campaign and claims of cash distribution ahead of voting on April 23.

In Chennai, a complaint was filed against Vijay-led Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), accusing it of planning an online campaign during the "silent period". Petitioners L Devasagayam and P Adikesavan urged Chief Electoral Officer Archana Patnaik to act to protect ballot secrecy and prevent illegal practices.

They alleged that TVK intended to covertly film votes cast in its favour and circulate the videos on Facebook, Instagram and X to create a perception of mass support, intimidate voters and amplify messaging through coordinated campaigns, including bot networks. They termed this a direct threat to free and fair elections. Adikesavan cited similar instances during the Puducherry Assembly polls and urged real-time monitoring of social media platforms by cybercrime authorities, along with prompt removal of such content under IT Rules, 2021.

In Coimbatore, AIADMK candidate Amman K Arjunan staged a protest alleging distribution of cash for votes in the Coimbatore South constituency. He claimed that "men from Karur" were caught distributing money and expressed concern over widespread malpractice.

Arjunan sought action for violation of poll model code. —*PTI*

Cash seized from DMK Mylapore candidate's aide

CHENNAI, 22 APRIL

The Election Commission confiscated a number of cash bundles, in Rs 500 denomination, from the residence of an aide to DMK's Mylapore candidate on Wednesday. A police official stated that the flying squad seized cash from the residence of Sathyamurthy, an aide to DMK candidate Dha Velu. Authorities also obtained evidence suggesting the funds were intended to entice voters. The cash has been handed over to the Income Tax department for a detailed investigation, the police official said. BJP spokesperson Narayanan sought disqualification of Velu be from contesting in the 23 April Tamil Nadu Assembly poll, where Velu is pitted against BJP candidate Tamilisai Soundararajan and TVK candidate. P Venkataramanan. —*PTI*

TMC alleges central forces assaulted locals in Nandigram

KOLKATA, 22 APRIL

The TMC on Wednesday lodged multiple complaints with the Election Commission, alleging misconduct by central forces and violations by BJP leaders ahead of the 23 April polling in West Bengal.

The party accused CRPF personnel of using "disproportionate criminal force" on locals in Nandigram, claiming several people were assaulted without provocation on 21 April and required hospitalisation. It submitted photographs of the injured and alleged the action violated the EC's norms on force deployment. However, an EC official said the complaint was examined and no such incident was found.

Polling in Nandigram will see BJP's Suvendu Adhikari seeking re-election against TMC candidate Pabitra Kar. Adhikari is also contesting against Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Bhabanipur in the second phase on April 29.

MCC violation charge against Adhikari for violating Model Code of Conduct during a rally in South 24 Parganas. It alleged that a meeting permitted till 1.30 pm continued until around 5 pm after his helicopter landed late, breaching EC guidelines. TMC also claimed that police and central forces blocked roads, disrupting a pre-approved TMC event and "monopolising public space". It termed the conduct of authorities partisan and sought action. Adhikari was not available for comment. —*PTI*

31 DEATHS & 19 YRS LATER

HC absolves 4 in Malegaon blast case

MUMBAI, 22 APRIL

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday discharged four men accused in the 2006 Malegaon serial bomb blasts, quashing all the charges against them, including of terror, and leaving unanswered the question of who was responsible for the explosions that killed 31 people.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice Shree Chandrashekhar and Justice Shyam Chandak allowed the appeals filed by four accused -- Rajendra Chaudhary, Dhan Singh, Manohar Ram Singh Narwaria, and Lokesh Sharma -- challenging the framing of charges by a special NIA court against them.

The four were charged under various sections of the Indian Penal Code for murder and criminal conspiracy, and also under the Unlawful (Activities) Prevention Act (UAPA), a stringent anti-terror law.

In September last year, a special NIA court framed charges against the four accused. They then moved the HC against the special court order.

In January this year, the HC, while admitting the pleas of accused, noted that a prima facie case for interference was made out and stayed further proceedings before the trial court pending the outcome of the matter.

The four accused, in their plea in HC, claimed that the NIA had failed to produce any evidence against them.

The HC in 2019 granted bail to the four men (present appellants), observing that they had been incarcerated for over six years without trial.

On 8 September, 2006, four bombs exploded in Nashik district's Malegaon town in North Maharashtra, three inside the premises of Hamidia Masjid and Bada Kabrastan just after Friday prayers, and the fourth in Mushawarat Chowk, claiming 31 lives and injuring 312 persons. —*PTI*

No action against KCR in Kaleshwaram case: T'gana High Court

HYDERABAD, 22 APRIL

In a relief to BRS chief K Chandrasekhar Rao and three others, the Telangana High Court on Wednesday directed that no action be taken against them on the basis of findings of the PC Ghose Commission, which probed the alleged irregularities in the execution of Kaleshwaram irrigation project.

Delivering its orders on a batch of petitions filed by KCR, former minister T Harish Rao and others, a division bench of Chief Justice Aparesh Kumar Singh and Justice G M Mohiuddin, however, said the constitution of the Commission is neither arbitrary, illegal nor ultra vires of the Constitution.

The commission, headed by retired Supreme Court judge Justice P C Ghose, in its report earlier held Chandrasekhar Rao accountable for alleged irregularities in the project.

The report was tabled in the state assembly in August last year. Challenging the report, KCR and Harish Rao and others approached the High Court seeking to quash it.

A member of BRS legal team claimed that the panel's report became 'useless' following the HC order. —*PTI*

IRS officer's daughter raped, strangled in Delhi home

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

The 22-year-old daughter of a senior Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer was allegedly raped and murdered at her residence in southeast Delhi's Kailash Hills on Wednesday morning, police said.

The prime suspect, Rahul Meena, 19, a domestic helper, had worked with the family for nearly eight months before being fired a month ago for alleged misappropriation of daily purchase bills.

Preliminary investigations suggest the victim was alone at her residence when an intruder entered around 6am. The assailant allegedly sexually assaulted her, then struck her—inflicting severe blunt force trauma to her head and face—before strangling her with a phone charger cable. Her family later discovered her body in the home.

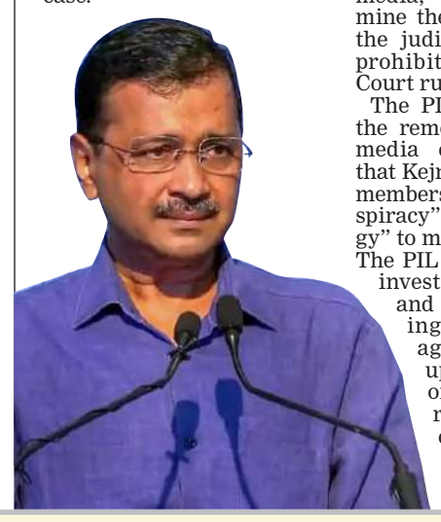
Police said the crime is believed to have taken place when the victim's parents had stepped out for their routine gym visit, leaving her home alone. Investigators suspect the accused gained entry into the house during this brief window.

Police said Meena was seen near the house days earlier but has been missing since; a manhunt is underway. Two people have been detained for questioning. —*PTI*

HC judge recuses himself from Kejri's contempt case

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Delhi High Court Justice Tejas Karia recused himself on Wednesday from a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) seeking contempt action against AAP leaders Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, and others. The petition alleges that the leaders shared clips of court proceedings related to Kejriwal's plea to recuse Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma in the liquor policy case.



Besides the AAP leaders, the other parties in the PIL include the high court administration and social media giants Meta, X and Google. Justice Karia, a former partner at a leading law firm, represented Meta in several cases before his elevation.

Vaibhav Singh filed a complaint with the High Court Registrar General on 15 April against the alleged unauthorised sharing of court proceedings on social media, which can undermine the independence of the judiciary and is also prohibited under High Court rules.

The PIL also prayed for the removal of the social media content. Alleging that Kejriwal and his party members hatched a "conspiracy" and "dirty strategy" to malign the judiciary. The PIL urged that an SIT investigate the matter and contempt proceedings be initiated against "all who uploaded, reposted or forwarded the recording from the court proceedings on 13 April".—*PTI*

BYPOLLS TEST PARTIES' REGIONAL STRENGTH

Bypolls in Maharashta and Gujarat are shaped by sympathy votes & caste dynamics

Rahuri, Maharashtra

The bypoll was necessitated by the death of BJP's Shivajirao Kardile and the saffron party has fielded his son Akshay Kardile. NCP(SP) has nominated Govind Mokate. Former MLA Prajakt Tanpure of NCP(SP), who was a key contender, withdrew his nomination, a move interpreted as an attempt to avoid a direct confrontation.

MOKATE GOVIND KHANDU

Age:	53
Party:	NCP (SP)
Edu:	BCom
Criminal cases:	1
Assets:	Rs 1.5 cr

AKSHAY KARDILE

Age:	33
Party:	BJP
Edu:	MBA
Criminal cases:	1
Assets:	Rs 2.79 cr

Umreth, Gujarat

The bypoll was necessitated by the death of sitting BJP MLA Govind Parmar. The contest is a direct BJP–Cong fight. BJP has fielded Harshad Parmar, son of the late MLA, while Cong has nominated Bhrugurajsinh Chauhan. Caste dynamics — OBC and Patidar votes — are expected to be decisive for the parties as it tests their influence in state.

BHRUGURAJSINH CHAUHAN

Age:	62
Party:	Cong
Edu:	Graduate
Criminal cases:	Nil
Assets:	Rs 11.7 lakh

HARSHAD PARMAR

Age:	41
Party:	BJP
Edu:	Journalism diploma
Criminal cases:	1
Assets:	Rs 1.44 cr

Baramati, Maharashtra

The bypolls were necessitated after DyCM Ajit Pawar died in a plane crash in January with four others. His wife, Sunetra Pawar, who took his place as the DyCM, is set to be elected unopposed as all major parties are abstaining from fielding candidates. Notably, Ajit held the seat for eight consecutive terms.

SUNETRA PAWAR

Age:	62
Party:	NCP
Edu:	BCom
Criminal cases:	Nil
Assets:	Rs 122 cr

SIR SPARKS STORM IN 'HIGHLY POLARISED' WB

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal has been deeply contentious. Around 12 per cent of the state's pre-SIR voter list was removed, with the Election Commission of India (ECI) citing reasons such as death, migration, absence and duplicate entries. The exercise triggered violence, political confrontation and widespread public distress, even prompting a Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to appear before the Supreme Court.

Bengal has the 2nd largest population of Muslims in India, and SIR allegedly disproportionately targeted them. Roughly 65% of the 91 lakh names removed were Muslims.

A key point of dispute is the ECI's "logical discrepancy" category, used to flag issues such as age gaps or spelling mismatches in family records. Lacking legal precedent, it accounted for 27 lakh deletions. The ECI has set up tribunals for appeals, but with no fixed timeline. Supreme Court has ruled that affected individuals cannot vote until cleared. Amid a political slugfest between TMC and BJP, citizens quietly suffered. Among those deleted was 97-year-old Subarna Bala Poddar, a Partition refugee who had voted in every election since Independence. She submitted valid documents, but her claims were rejected because of spelling discrepancies in older rolls. The 88-year-old grandson of Nandalal Bose — the artist who illustrated the original Constitution — had his name removed. Others such as Nobel-laurate Amartya Sen, and cricketer Mohammed Shami were also summoned by ECI. CM Mamata Banerjee appeared in Supreme Court, and argued against the logical discrepancy category. Banerjee said that the ECI's conduct was unprofessional and alleged that at least 110 polling officers died by suicide due to work place stress and AI was used to delete voters.

Frustration escalated across the state, and seven judicial officers, including three women, were confined for over seven hours by an agitated crowd inside a Block Development Officer's office in Malda.

With BJP alleging an influx of "infiltrators" and TMC claiming that Centre was targeting Muslims, Supreme Court perhaps had merit in calling West Bengal a "highly polarised state".

BYE BYE ANNAMALAI?

Annamalai, the former IPS officer who fought tooth and nail for BJP's rise in Tamil Nadu between 2021 and 2024, is not contesting this Assembly election. He built an aggressive youth-focused strategy and turned the party into a credible third front in a Dravidian-dominated state. He took on the DMK with sharp attacks, including the "DMK Files" — a series of corruption allegations against Chief Minister MK Stalin and his ministers. He also led the 'En Mann, En Makkal' yatra across all 234 constituencies, strengthening BJP's grassroots presence. His hardwork helped increase the BJP's vote share from 3.7 per cent in 2019 to about 11 per cent in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, though it won no seats.

But come 2025, Annamalai was replaced as the state BJP chief. His attacks on AIADMK leaders, including J Jayalalithaa, had strained ties and led to a split in 2023. To rebuild the alliance for 2026, the BJP appointed Nainar Nagendran as its head. The former AIADMK minister is seen as a bridge-builder.

Annamalai was not included in the candidate list this year. He said he chose not to contest so he could focus on campaigning. Reports suggest he was unhappy with the 27 seats given to the BJP by the AIADMK, as many were seen as difficult to win.

2 CIA officers killed in Mexico vehicle crash

WASHINGTON, 22 APRIL

Two US officials killed in a vehicle crash in northern Mexico were CIA officers, sources said, as they returned from an operation targeting a clandestine drug lab. Two Mexican investigators also died in the crash in Chihuahua state. Authorities in both countries have given conflicting accounts of the operation, highlighting sensitivities over US involvement in Mexico's security efforts. The US Embassy had initially described the Americans as personnel supporting anti-cartel operations. President Claudia Sheinbaum said she was unaware of any formal joint mission, though she acknowledged cooperation with US agencies. The incident comes amid pressure from Donald Trump for stronger action against cartels and increased intelligence collaboration. —*PTI*

Libyan groups sent Colombian mercs into Sudan: UN

CAIRO, 22 APRIL

UN report has found that an armed group in Libya facilitated the transfer of Colombian mercenaries, weapons and fuel to support Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in its war with the military. The Subul al-Salam Battalion, linked to eastern commander Khalifa Haftar, used the southern town of Kufra as a key hub for moving fighters and supplies, the report said. It said the RSF used Libyan territory as a rear base, with escorts, fuel and spare parts aiding operations, including advances near the Uwaynat tri-border area. The findings relate to the Sudan conflict (2023–present), which has killed at least 59,000 people, in what the UN calls the world's largest humanitarian crisis. —*PTI*

Taiwan Prez skips Africa visit amid China pressure

TAIPEI, 22 APRIL

Taiwan's President postponed his visit to Africa after three countries withdrew permission for him to fly over their territories, citing pressure from China, his office said on Tuesday. President Lai Ching-te was set to visit Eswatini, Taiwan's sole remaining ally in Africa, from 22 to 26 April. "The cancellation of flight permits by Seychelles, Mauritius and Madagascar was due to pressure from Chinese authorities, including economic coercion," said Secretary-General to the President, Pan Meng-an. He added that China's alleged pressure is blatant interference that disrupts the region and alienates Taiwanese people. China considers self-ruled Taiwan a breakaway province and bars its diplomatic partners from formal ties with Taipei which now has diplomatic ties with only 12 countries. —*PTI*

Weinstein rape retrial opens in New York

NEW YORK, 22 APRIL

Harvey Weinstein, 73, once a powerful Hollywood figure, saw his career collapse in 2017 as long-rumoured sexual misconduct became public, leading to criminal charges in New York and Los Angeles. Tuesday's trial addresses allegations from 2013 involving Weinstein and Jessica Mann, a then-aspiring actress. They met at a Los Angeles party in early 2013, when the 27-year-old was struggling financially. The case centres on an alleged rape during an encounter at a Manhattan hotel. In 2020, Weinstein was convicted of third-degree rape regarding Mann. However, this conviction was later overturned on appeal due to procedural errors. During a retrial in 2025, Weinstein was convicted of sexually assaulting another woman, causing the judge to declare a mistrial. —*PTI*

Born after 2008? You can't buy cigarettes in the UK

LONDON, 22 APRIL

The Parliament of the United Kingdom has passed the Tobacco and Vapes Bill that seeks to ban selling of cigarette to anyone born on or after 1 January, 2009.

The objective of the legislation is to create a smoke-free generation and to regulate vaping in public places.

With the passage of the legislation, children who have attained 17 years of age and those below that age will no longer be able to buy cigarettes during their lifetime. The bill aims to ensure the country has a 'smoke-free generation.' The bill also makes it illegal to sell tobacco to anyone born after 1 January, 2009

The bill is likely to come to into effect after the royal assent. It has been unanimously passed by both the Commons and the House of Lords. With this the ministers will now have more powers to regulate tobacco, nicotine products and vaping besides their marketing, packaging and flavouring.

The legislation further bans vaping in public places including in cars carrying children, at playgrounds and areas outside schools, hospitals.

The bill avowedly aims to deal with the larger issue of the impact of smoking on public health.

Smoking has been one of the prime reasons for death and illness and disability in UK.

The legislation now hopes to address this issue more effectively, health experts maintained. —*Agencies*

Trump extends ceasefire with Iran 'indefinitely'

Don thanks Pak, but no clarity on peace talks

Iran said the US and Israel destroyed 24 bridges across the country during the war—*IRNA*

WASHINGTON, 22 APRIL

US President Donald Trump extended the ceasefire with Iran indefinitely at the request of Pakistan to give Tehran's leadership more time to prepare a unified proposal to end the war on Wednesday.

Trump's dramatic announcement on Truth Social came just hours before the two-week ceasefire was set to expire. He added that the government of Iran was "seriously fractured". Trump added that the US' blockade of Iran's ports will remain in place, even as Tehran called it a violation of the ceasefire.

Pakistan's top leadership welcomed the announcement. Pakistan had urged an extension of the truce due to uncertainty surrounding the second round of talks, as it seeks to broker lasting peace. However, there was still no clarity on the date of the next round of talks, which were slated to take place in Islamabad on Monday.

However, Trump told the New York Post that it was "possible" that the next round of talks could take place within the next 36 to 72 hours, or as early as Friday.

However, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei said Tehran has not yet decided whether to attend a new round of Pakistani-mediated talks in Islamabad.

"We have made it clear that if we conclude that going to Islamabad is in our national interest, we would go there. But for the time being, the decision has not yet been made," Baqaei told the BBC on Wednesday.

Baqaei said Iran's delegation had travelled to Pakistan for the first round of talks "with good faith and sense of seriousness, but you have a negotiating party that has shown its lack of seriousness, lack of good faith".

Meanwhile, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) said that Trump "unilaterally extended the ceasefire" and said that "Iran rejected the US conditions for negotiations".

Notably, Trump's extensions comes hours after he said he would resume bombing Iran if a deal was not reached on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent announced sanctions on 14 individuals, entities and aircraft based in Iran, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates for their alleged involvement in procuring or transporting weapons or weapons components on behalf of Iran. He warned that Iran's Kharg Island storage facilities could reach capacity within days, forcing oil wells to shut down.

Notably the extension of the ceasefire does not address the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil once passed. —*Agencies*

AMID CEASEFIRE

Israel kills at least three in Lebanon

BEIRUT/TEL AVIV, 22 APRIL

Separate Israel strikes on Lebanon killed at least three people, ahead of ceasefire talks slated for Thursday in the US.

In the first instance, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) said its troops and air force carried out a strike in southern Lebanon, where it accused two alleged Hezbollah members of crossing the "Forward Defence Line" and approaching Israeli soldiers on Tuesday.

Israel breached the ceasefire 200 TIMES, says Hezbollah

The Forward Defence Line, also referred to as the Yellow Line, demarcates a "buffer zone" where Israeli troops will be stationed and what Lebanese people cannot cross. It extends several miles into southern Lebanon and contains dozens of villages whose residents have not been allowed to return. The line was formed after the 10-day ceasefire.

Separately, Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said a drone strike on the village of Jabbour killed one person and wounded two people.

Meanwhile, French President Emmanuel Macron and Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam called on Israel to respect territorial integrity after a meeting in Paris. —*Agencies*

Israel forces demolish buildings in several villages and towns of southern Lebanon, on Wednesday —*NNA*

US seeks to triple budget for drones

The Pentagon seeks to triple spending on drones and related technology to more than USD 74 billion and invest over USD 30 billion into more critical munitions, including missile interceptors, whose stockpiles have become critically low during the Iran war, as part of Trump's push to boost defence spending to USD 1.5 trillion in the 2027 budget. Donald Trump's sons Eric Trump and Donald Trump Jr have also invested billions in various drone manufacturing companies, including Powerus, and have tried to increase their sales amid the Iran war. Trump Jr also sits on the board of Unusual Machines, a company focused on onshoring drone component manufacturing.

Iran hangs man with 'Mossad ties'

Iran hanged a man on Wednesday, alleging he had ties to Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, as Tehran continues a series of executions after nationwide protests in January. The Mizan news said Mehdi Farid passed information to the Israeli spy agency. Iran's judiciary typically sentences people in closed-door trials without allowing defendants to properly defend themselves.

Hormuz has direct implications for India: Rajnath in Germany

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

"For a developing country like India, which relies on West Asia for its energy requirements, disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz are stark realities with direct implications on India's security and economic stability," Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Tuesday while addressing the German Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence and Security.

He highlighted that in view of these challenges and their direct implications, India has adopted a proactive and coordinated strategy. To deal with modern-day challenges, Singh proposed a new approach based on willingness to adapt to changing environments.

Singh also made a strong pitch for enhanced collaboration between India and Germany's defence ecosystems. "We also see a clear convergence of views at the European Union level, reflected in the growing momentum to engage with India, including through the India–EU Defence and Strategic Partnership," Singh said.

He further asserted that Aatmanirbhar Bharat is not merely a procurement program, but "an invitation to co-create, co-develop, and co-innovate." Singh praised the strength of Germany's industrial leaders and its dynamic Mittelstand (small and medium-sized enterprises). He reiterated that the two nations are not only strategic partners but also consequential voices in shaping the global discourse of the present times. —*PTI*

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during an interaction event with members of Indian community in Berlin, Germany—*PTI*

Army Chief Gen Dwivedi in US on official visit

WASHINGTON, 22 APRIL

General Upendra Dwivedi is on an official visit to the US and was hosted by India's envoy to the US Vinay Mohan Kwatra.

The Army Chief was set to meet top US defence services officials later on Wednesday.

The Army Chief's visit comes close on the heels of the visits of Air Chief Amar Preet Singh and Navy chief Dinesh Tripathi to the US, marking the continuation of high-level military-to-military exchanges between India and America.

Earlier, Gen Dwivedi was accorded a Guard of Honour at Fort Shafter, Hawaii, during his ongoing visit to the United States Army Pacific (USARPAC).

He held discussions with General Ronald P Clark, Commanding General, USARPAC, and other senior leaders, "focusing on strengthening India-US defence cooperation", the Indian Army said in a social media post.

He also undertook an aerial tour of Oahu island. —*PTI*

EU grants preliminary approval for $106B loan after Ukraine fixes pipeline

BRUSSELS, 22 APRIL

The European Union granted preliminary approval of a 90 billion euro (USD 106 billion) loan package for Ukraine, which Kyiv needs to meet its military and financial for the next two years.

The decision in Brussels on Wednesday came as President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Ukraine has repaired the Druzhba pipeline, which allows Russia to sell oil to Hungary and Slovakia, but runs through Ukraine.

Under outgoing Prime Minister Viktor Orban, Hungary has been vetoing the loan, saying that it must receive Russian oil before it could approve the loan. However, Orban, seen as pro-Russian, lost the 12 April election to pro-European Peter Magyar.

Zelenskyy had insisted that Russian strikes damaged the pipeline, but said it can "resume operations", despite urging countries to stop buying Moscow's oil. The loan is now expected to be signed off on Thursday. —*Agencies*

The 4,00km Druzhba pipeline that carries Russian oil to Europe has been a sticking point for Hungary —*TASS*

AMID PROTESTS

Nepal's new HM quits over links to money laundering

KATHMANDU, 22 APRIL

Nepal's Home Minister Sudhan Gurung has resigned from his post after allegations surfaced linking him to share transactions with a controversial businessman being investigated on charges of money laundering.

Gurung rose as the leader after the Gen Z protest of September and won from Gorkha in the 5 March elections. On Wednesday, he submitted his resignation to Prime Minister Balendra Shah (Balen).

The controversy surfaced after documents made public on Sunday showed that Gurung holds shares in his own name in Star Micro Insurance and Liberty Micro Insurance, companies associated with controversial businessman Deepak Bhatt and currently under investigation following his arrest.

Gurung informed the public about his decision through social media.

"…In recent days, I have taken seriously the questions, comments, and public interest raised by citizens on issues, including my share… Therefore, to ensure that there is a fair investigation into matters related to me and that there is no conflict of interest while holding office and that it is not affected in any way, I have resigned from the position of Home Minister."

Meanwhile. protests have erupted in Nepal against Prime Minister Balen Shah, with students, political parties, and ordinary citizens taking to the streets against the government decision to impose mandatory customs duty on goods worth more than Rs 100 imported from India. —*Agencies*

Rupee nears 94/USD level; settles 39P lower

MUMBAI, 22 APRIL

The rupee weakened for a third straight session, falling 39 paise to settle at 93.83 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, nearing the 94-mark last seen on March 23. The currency came under pressure as uncertainty over US-Iran talks dampened hopes of easing West Asia tensions, pushing up crude oil prices. Selling in domestic equities and continued foreign capital outflows also weighed on sentiment, traders said. The rupee opened at 93.69 and hit an intraday low of 93.87. It had declined 28 paise on Tuesday and 25 paise on Monday. Meanwhile, the dollar index eased 0.07 per cent to 98.15, while Brent crude rose 1.29 per cent to USD 99.75 per barrel —*PTI*

Silver, gold fall amid US-Iran talks uncertainty

NEW DELHI, 10 APRIL

Gold prices fell by Rs 300 to Rs 1.57 lakh per 10g while silver plunged by Rs 2,700 to Rs 2.55 lakh per kg in the national capital on Wednesday amid uncertainty over US-Iran peace negotiations. According to the All India Sarafa Association, gold of 99.9 per cent purity slipped Rs 300 to Rs 1,57,000 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes). Market participants will continue to respond to ongoing developments from both sides, with price movements reflecting a cautious wait-and-see approach until clearer signals emerge. In the international markets, spot silver rose 1.46 per cent to USD 77.80 per ounce while gold advanced 0.48 per cent to USD 4,742.97 per ounce. "Gold traded positive after a gap-up opening, supported by ongoing ceasefire hopes, although conflicting statements from US President Donald Trump regarding extension of the ceasefire have kept volatility elevated," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said. He noted that the mixed signals on geopolitical developments are creating uncertainty across assets.—*PTI*

'India's textile exports grow 2.1% despite US' tariffs'

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

India's textile exports, including handicrafts, rose 2.1 per cent to Rs 3.16 lakh crore in 2025-26 despite steep US tariffs, the government said.The US, India's largest market, imposed tariffs rising from 10 per cent in April 2025 to 50 per cent by August, before easing to 10 per cent from February 24 for 150 days following a Supreme Court ruling. Exports expanded to over 120 destinations, with strong growth in markets such as the UAE, UK, Germany, Japan and parts of Africa.Ready-made garments led exports, up 2.9 per cent, while cotton products remained flat and man-made textiles grew 3.6 per cent. Handicrafts rose 6.1 per cent. Industry expects upcoming FTAs and policy support schemes like RoSCTL and RoDTEP to boost growth further —*PTI*

L&T to supply 3LT ammonia to Japan's ITOCHU

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Larsen & Toubro on Wednesday said it has signed a long-term pact with Japan's ITOCHU Corporation to supply 3 lakh tonnes of green ammonia annually from its proposed Kandla facility in Gujarat. The agreement was signed by L&T Energy GreenTech Ltd, its wholly owned arm, the company said in a filing. Supplies are expected to support ITOCHU's bunkering operations in Singapore and other locations, aiding early adoption of green ammonia as a marine fuel. Singapore is emerging as a key hub for ammonia bunkering. The pact builds on a joint development agreement signed last year and strengthens L&T's green hydrogen strategy, positioning Kandla as a major export hub for low-carbon fuels. —*PTI*

Bear drags markets down 1% on IT sell-off, oil surge

Sensex slips below 79,000 pts as Nifty settles at 24,378

MUMBAI, 22 APRIL

Market sentiment was hit by foreign fund outflows and concerns over prolonged instability in West Asia -*AI*

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty fell nearly 1 per cent on Wednesday, snapping a three-day rally amid heavy selling in IT stocks and rising crude oil prices.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 756.84 points, or 0.95 per cent, to close at 78,516.49, after falling as much as 831.03 points during the day. The NSE Nifty declined 198.50 points, or 0.81 per cent, to settle at 24,378.10.

Market sentiment was hit by foreign fund outflows and concerns over prolonged instability in West Asia. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 1.26 per cent to USD 99.72 per barrel.

Among Sensex stocks, HCL Tech plunged 10.85 per cent, emerging as the top loser. The broader IT pack was under pressure, with Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services and Tech Mahindra also declining sharply. Banking and auto stocks added to the losses, with ICICI Bank and Mahindra & Mahindra among the laggards.

On the other hand, Hindustan Unilever, NTPC, Eternal and Trent were among the gainers, offering limited support to the indices. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) sold equities worth Rs 1,918.99 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. "Geopolitical uncertainty remains the key trigger," said Hariprasad K of Livelong Wealth, citing stalled US–Iran talks and rising oil prices, which are adding to inflation and currency concerns.

In Asia, markets in South Korea, Japan and China ended higher, while Hong Kong closed lower. European markets were mixed, while US markets ended lower on Tuesday. On Tuesday, the Sensex had surged 753.03 points and the Nifty gained 211.75 points. —*PTI*

AFTER Q4 RESULTS

HCLTech shares tank 10%; Rs 37K cr mkt cap wiped off

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

-HCLTECH

Shares of HCLTech tumbled nearly 10 per cent on Wednesday after its March quarter earnings failed to impress investors.

The stock plunged 9.70 per cent to Rs 1,301.60 on the BSE and 9.72 per cent to Rs 1,301 on the NSE. Its market valuation eroded by Rs 37,652.1 crore to Rs 3,53,536.29 crore.

The Noida-based IT major on Tuesday reported a 4.2 per cent year-on-year rise in consolidated net profit to Rs 4,488 crore for the January-March quarter of FY26, compared with Rs 4,307 crore a year ago. Revenue from operations rose 12.34 per cent to Rs 33,981 crore from Rs 30,246 crore.

However, the company flagged a volatile demand environment marked by tariffs, reduced discretionary spending and delayed decision-making, while guiding FY27 revenue growth at 1-4 per cent in constant currency terms.

CEO and MD C Vijayakumar said performance fell short of expectations due to softness in parts of the business, though AI-led offerings gained traction with annualised advanced AI revenues crossing USD 620 million in Q4. He added the firm's priority is to position itself for long-term AI-driven growth.

Other IT stocks also declined, with Tech Mahindra down 4.18 per cent, Infosys falling 3.78 per cent, Tata Consultancy Services slipping 1.83 per cent and Wipro easing 0.66 per cent. The BSE IT index dropped 3.04 per cent. —*PTI*

-X/@TESLA

Tesla drives in 2nd model to India; plans expansion

MUMBAI, 22 APRIL

Tesla will bring its humanoid robot, Optimus, to India at the right time

—Tesla

Tesla on Wednesday announced accelerating its electric car repertoire in India with its three-row six-seater SUV Model YL priced at Rs 61.99 lakh, its second offering in the country. The company, which last year made its much-awaited entry into India with the launch of its Model Y, is also looking to expand its charging network across highways connecting major cities.

Tesla has already enabled five 'strategically selected' supercharger stations in India. He added that India has a population similar to China, where Tesla already operates over 2,500 superchargers.

"What we are going to do in the coming quarter or in this quarter is to expand our service and body shop network and presence in cities of Bengal, Hyderabad, Chennai and Ahmedabad," Tesla India General Manager Sharad Agarwal said at the launch.

Singh also said that in the coming months, a supercharger and charging network will link major cities across the country—including Delhi, Chandigarh, Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Pune, Bangalore, and Chennai—with infrastructure rolled out along key highways. —*PTI*

AMID IRAN WAR

GAIL says its LNG vessel flagged off from US

HOUSTON, 22 APRIL

The shipment assumes significance as India seeks to diversify LNG sourcing from 15 to 30 countries to mitigate global supply disruptions -*PTI*

GAIL (India) Ltd has flagged off its LNG carrier 'Energy Fidelity' from the Sabine Pass terminal in the US, marking a step towards strengthening India's cleaner fuel supply chain.

The vessel, with a capacity of 1,74,000 cubic metres, was flagged off on April 20 and is en route to India. The ceremony was presided over by India's Consul General in Houston, DC Manjunath.

The shipment assumes significance as India seeks to diversify LNG sourcing from 15 to 30 countries to mitigate global supply disruptions.

GAIL said the carrier is central to its future-ready shipping portfolio, equipped with advanced air lubrication systems and specialised propulsion technology to improve efficiency and reduce carbon emissions during trans-oceanic voyages. The company described it as a key logistical link supporting India's energy security and sustainable growth.

GAIL holds long-term contracts for 5.8 million metric tonnes per annum (MMTPA) of LNG from US suppliers, including 3.5 MMTPA from Sabine Pass operated by Cheniere Energy and 2.3 MMTPA from Cove Point run by Berkshire Hathaway Energy. These imports are largely linked to the Henry Hub benchmark, often making them more affordable than crude-linked supplies. The company is also exploring acquisition of a 26 per cent stake in a US LNG project to secure a 15-year supply deal of 1 MMTPA, likely from 2029-30. —*PTI*

• The vessel, with a capacity of 1,74,000 cubic metres, was flagged off on April 20 and is en route to India. The ceremony was presided over by India's Consul General in Houston, DC Manjunath.

Amid jet fuel prices surge, Lufthansa cuts 20,000 flights

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Germany's flag carrier Lufthansa has announced the cancellation of 20,000 short-haul flights between May and October as jet fuel prices surge amid the West Asia crisis.

The airline said fuel prices have doubled since the outbreak of the Iran conflict, prompting it to trim capacity by under one per cent through the withdrawal of unprofitable routes, particularly from its Frankfurt and Munich hubs. Around 120 daily flights were cancelled on Sunday.

The move is expected to save about 40,000 metric tonnes of jet fuel. While services will be reduced, Lufthansa plans selective expansion in Zurich, Vienna and Brussels as part of a network rebalancing strategy across its six European hubs.

Routes to Bydgoszcz, Rzeszow and Stavanger have been temporarily suspended, while some connections will be routed through other hubs.

The decision comes amid soaring crude prices, with Brent crossing $100 per barrel due to supply concerns, including risks around the Strait of Hormuz. —*ANI*

India to blend ethanol in aviation fuel

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

India has permitted the blending of ethanol and other synthetic hydrocarbons in aviation turbine fuel (ATF), but has not set any immediate mandatory targets, according to a government notification, even as the Opposition flagged alleged gains to firms linked to Union Minister Nitin Gadkari's family.

The amendment to the Aviation Turbine Fuel (Regulation of Marketing) Order, 2001, under the Essential Commodities Act, broadens the definition of ATF to include blends with synthetic hydrocarbons. The move is aimed at reducing emissions and cutting reliance on imported crude.

Under the revised rules notified by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, ATF will include fuels conforming to IS 1571 standards as well as blends under IS 17081, enabling the use of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF). Globally, countries such as the UK and Japan are mandating SAF blending to curb aviation emissions.

India has set indicative targets for international flights — 1 per cent SAF blending by 2027, 2 per cent by 2028 and 5 per cent by 2030 — in line with the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA). No targets have been fixed for domestic operations.

The policy shift had drawn criticism, with Opposition parties alleging that ethanol blending benefits companies linked to **Union Minister Nitin Gadkari**'s family. They pointed to the rapid rise of CIAN Agro and Manas Agro, associated with his sons Nikhil and Sarang Gadkari. CIAN Agro, once a small agro-processor, has reported a sharp surge in business after entering ethanol, with revenues rising from Rs 17 crore in Q1 FY24 to Rs 511 crore in Q1 FY26, alongside a steep jump in profits and market valuation, figures cited by critics to question potential conflicts of interest. —*PTI*

NCLAT reserves order on Vedanta pleas against Adani over JAL

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

-FREEPIK

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) on Wednesday reserved its order on Vedanta's petitions challenging the selection of Adani Enterprises' bid for debt-laden Jaiprakash Associates Ltd (JAL) under the insolvency process.

A two-member bench of Chairperson Ashok Bhushan and Member (Technical) Barun Mitra concluded hearings after arguments from Vedanta, the Resolution Professional, Committee of Creditors (CoC) and Adani Enterprises. The tribunal directed parties to file written submissions within two days.

Vedanta argued that lenders adopted flawed evaluation metrics, rejecting its higher bid of Rs 17,926 crore in favour of Adani's Rs 14,535 crore offer. On March 24, the NCLAT had refused an interim stay on the NCLT order approving Adani's plan but made it subject to the appeal's outcome. The Supreme Court later declined a stay, directing that major policy decisions require tribunal approval.

Adani secured 89 per cent of creditor votes, ahead of Dalmia Bharat and Vedanta. The CoC said the process complied with Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code norms, stressing that evaluation is based on multiple factors, not just bid value.

JAL, admitted to insolvency in June 2024 over Rs 57,185 crore debt, has assets across real estate, cement, power and hospitality, including projects in Delhi-NCR and cement plants in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. —*PTI*

NO OTP FOR RS 15,000 PAYMENTS

RBI mandates 24-hour alert for auto payments

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

For bigger payments, authentication is still needed. However, the limit was raised to Rs 1L for insurance premiums and mutual fund investments -*PTI*

Customers will now get a warning at least 24 hours before any automatic payment is deducted, after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued a new e-mandate framework to make recurring payments simpler and safer.

Under the new rules, auto-debits of up to Rs 15,000 can go through without a fresh OTP after the first approval. This will make it easier to pay for monthly subscriptions, SIPs, utility bills and other regular expenses, which often fail due to missed OTPs or network issues.

The first payment will still need approval through an additional security check. After that, payments within the limit can be processed automatically.

Banks must send a pre-debit alert with details such as the merchant name, amount and date. Customers will also get a confirmation after the payment is made.

For bigger payments, authentication is still needed. However, the limit has been raised to Rs 1 lakh for insurance premiums, mutual fund investments and credit card bills.

Customers can cancel or change auto-pay instructions at any time and can also stop a specific payment before it is processed. The RBI said no charges will be levied for using this facility.

The new rules bring all earlier guidelines under one system. The aim is to reduce failed payments while ensuring users stay informed and in control. —*ANI*

'AI growth limited by computing power, not model'

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

-FACEBOOK

Rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) is constrained, not by the quality of models, but availability and cost of computing power, according to a report by Goldman Sachs. The report highlighted that as demand for AI applications accelerates, the need for compute infrastructure such as high-performance chips and data centres is outgrowing supply.

Th report noted that industry focus is shifting away from building better models to working on how effectively these models can be run in production environments. Factors such as cost efficiency, reliability, performance, and the ability to route workloads across systems are becoming critical in determining competitive advantage. According to the report, value in the AI ecosystem is increasingly moving towards the execution layer, including technologies that manage model deployment, optimise compute usage, and ensure consistent performance. Goldman Sachs further noted that applied AI is approaching an inflexion point similar to the generative AI boom in 2022. —*ANI*

-PTI

Leading Indians in fray at Singapore Open golf

SINGAPORE, 22 APRIL

As many as 11 Indians, including Karandeep Kochhar, Gaganjeet Bhullar, SSP Chawrasia, and Jeev Milkha Singh, will tee off at the Singapore Open on Thursday, aiming to secure spots in the 154th edition of The Open Championship, golf's oldest Major, later this year. The 57th edition of the tournament is part of the International Series and offers a prize purse of USD 2 million, with the top two players, if not already exempt, earning spots in The Open Championship, scheduled for July.

Kochhar, in sublime form in recent months, will be one to watch. He is joined by 11-time Asian Tour winner Gaganjeet Bhullar, six-time winner SSP Chawrasia, and two-time Asian Tour Order of Merit champion Jeev Milkha Singh.

Also in the fray are Shiv Kapur, Ajeetesh Sandhu and Rashid Khan.—*PTI*

UTT Junior: TN's title win against Maharashtra

DEHRADUN, 22 APRIL

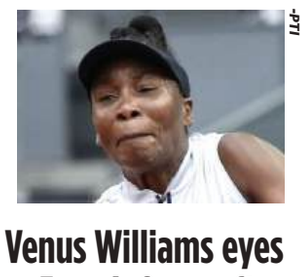
Top seeds Tamil Nadu stamped their authority with a 3-1 win over Maharashtra to clinch the U-19 boys' team title at the UTT Inter-State Junior and Youth National Table Tennis Championships here on Wednesday.

Tamil Nadu's charge was led by the rock-solid P B Abhinand, who delivered commanding wins over Neil Mulye and Kushal Chopda, sealing the title in style in the reverse singles. Maharashtra leaned heavily on Chopda a tactic that carried them to the final but exposed their lack of depth. Mulye showed fight, but the duo couldn't match Tamil Nadu's balance when it mattered.—*PTI*

Binu fires 9-under to lead in IGPL Invitational Congo

LUBUMBASHI, 22 APRIL

Young Shaurya Binu continued his fine run in the African Swing, carding a brilliant nine-under 64 to move atop the leaderboard after two rounds at the AM Green IGPL Invitational in Congo. The 21-year-old Binu, who is balancing his academics with golf and has recorded two top-10 finishes on the African Swing over the past two weeks, opened with a one-under 72 in the first round at the Par-73 Golf Club Lubumbashi. He then produced a stunning nine-under in the second round to move to 10-under after 36 holes, giving him a two-shot lead over four players. —*PTI*


-PTI

Venus Williams eyes French Open after 10th straight loss

MADRID, 22 APRIL

Venus Williams has her sights on the French Open. The 45-year-old former world No. 1 said Tuesday after losing her 10th straight singles match that she is considering playing at Roland Garros next month. "Yeah, I mean, to get my feet dirty, this was a great start," she said in her post-match news conference at the Madrid Open. "I'm not able to play Rome, I have other commitments, unfortunately, so I'm really super sad about that, actually. My husband is Italian, so we feel sad that we can't be there. So we would love to keep it going on the clay." Williams, a seven-time Grand Slam champion, lost 6-2, 6-4 to 20-year-old Spaniard Kaitlin Quevedo. Williams hadn't played in Madrid in five years.—*PTI*

Former champions MI, CSK seek consistency in IPL clash

Rohit, Dhoni perform batting routines amid fitness concerns

MUMBAI, 22 APRIL

Struggling former champions Mumbai Indians and Chennai Super Kings will be eyeing consistency as they await the return of their former captains Rohit Sharma and MS Dhoni, respectively, when they face off in the Indian Premier League here on Thursday.

Decked in their respective teams' training kits, Rohit Sharma and MS Dhoni batted in tandem in the nets session here on Wednesday, even as they are yet to be officially cleared for availability in the Indian Premier League clash between Mumbai Indians and Chennai Super Kings on Thursday.

The first leg of this year's IPL 'El Clasico' will be played here at the Wankhede Stadium on Thursday, but it remains to be seen if the two main protagonists of the famed MI-CSK rivalry are available for another bout.CSK began the tournament in search of form and the right combination, as most teams do, and just as they appeared to be settling, a hamstring injury to local talent Ayush Mhatre, who had scored 201 runs, dealt a major blow. They should have closed out the match comfortably after chasing 130 off 90 balls with eight wickets in hand, but a lack of initiative from the middle order allowed SRH to turn the tide in their favour.

While Sarfaraz has been consistent with 147 runs, he is yet to convert starts into a big innings despite holding a key batting role, especially with skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad enduring a disappointing campaign with just 82 runs.

Tilak revealed on advice from Rohit Sharma

Tilak Varma revealed on Wednesday that advice from Rohit Sharma to play the first 15-20 balls without overthinking the match situation helped him return to form with an IPL hundred.

Tilak struck 101 not out to set up a massive 99-run victory as the Mumbai Indians snapped their four-match losing streak with a win over the Gujarat Titans in their previous outing.

Tilak's unbeaten ton off 45 balls, studded with eight fours and seven sixes, came on the back of a slow start, with the left-handed batter reaching 19 not out off 22 balls at one stage.

The match starts at 7:30 pm IST. —*PTI*

Abhishek's maturity unquestioned, high-risk game needs leeway: Aaron

Sunrisers Hyderabad bowling coach Varun Aaron brushed aside any lack of maturity on the part of Abhishek Sharma even when he was going through a lean patch and lauded his sharp cricketing mind during his unbeaten 135 against Delhi Capitals in the IPL match here. Abhishek batted from start to finish in SRH's emphatic 47-run win over Delhi Capitals on Tuesday, unleashing his full range of strokes to hammer an unbeaten 135 off 68 deliveries, anchoring the side's fourth win in seven games this season. The young opener had endured a disastrous start at the T20 World Cup co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka earlier this year, but found his groove at the business end to help India lift the trophy. He has carried that form into the IPL. "I think he's always had that maturity, and that's been there over the last couple of years. You can't be the number one T20 batsman in the world without being mature. Obviously, he's somebody who sees the opposition, sees the surface and decides to play a certain way," said Aaron in the post-match press conference. Aaron said Abhishek showed he has a sharp cricketing mind, batting with caution early on before shifting gears and going hard at the bowling.

AFTER A DECADE

-PTI

India to host SAFF Women's C'ship

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

India has been drawn alongside defending champion Bangladesh and the Maldives in the upcoming SAFF Women's Championship, set to be played from 24 May to 7 June in Goa.

The five-time champion will host the tournament for the first time in a decade, with six teams competing for the title at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Fatorda.

The top two teams from each group will qualify for the semifinals, which will be played as single-leg knockouts to determine the finalists."The SAFF Championship will be played in Goa, which is one of the major football hubs in India. I thank the AIFF (All India Football Federation) for its cooperation in ensuring all arrangements are in place," said Purushottam Kattel, General Secretary of the South Asian Football Federation.

"We reached out to all seven FAs and finally closed in on India. All but one team — Pakistan — received clearance to travel. We are looking forward to a good tournament. Unfortunately, Pakistan did not get clearance from the government."

The SAFF Championship will be India's first competitive tournament since the AFC Asian Cup 2026, where it exited in the group stage. Since then, it has played friendlies against Kenya and Malawi, beating the latter in Africa.

"South Asian women's teams have been doing well recently. India and Bangladesh played in the Asian Cup, and Nepal also came close. So, we are expecting quite competitive matches," Kattel added.

Despite being the most successful team in the competition, India has not dominated the last two editions, with Bangladesh and Nepal contesting the finals in both 2022 and 2024. India's last SAFF Women's Championship title came in 2019, when it defeated host Nepal 3-1 in the final.

The draw:

Group A: Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan

Group B: India, Bangladesh, Maldives. —*PTI*

Asian Boxing C'ships: Preeti and Arundhati elevated

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Four Indian boxers, Preeti Pawar, Priya, Arundhati Chaudhary and Sachin have been promoted to the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) Core group following their impressive performances at the 2026 Asian Boxing Elite Championships, while three others have been inducted into the Development group.

The decision was taken during the 172nd Mission Olympic Cell (MOC) meeting on Wednesday.

Preeti (54kg), Priya (60kg) and Arundhati (70kg) were crowned gold medallists at the continental meet in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, earlier this month, while Sachin (60kg) secured a silver.

The Mission Olympic Cell, which reviews athlete performances under the TOPS framework, based its decision on a detailed assessment of recent results, world rankings and performance progression.

Preeti is set to compete in both the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and the Asian Games in Japan, scheduled later this year. Alongside Preeti will be Jaismine (57kg), Priya (W60 kg), Arundhati (W70 kg), and Sachin (M60 kg). Preeti, Priya and Sachin are also competing at the Asian Games.

India selected for FIFA Women's Development Programme

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

India was on Wednesday included among 12 countries selected by the world football governing body FIFA for its Women's Development Programme.

The other countries are Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Scotland, Canada, Mexico, Finland, Ghana, Jordan, Lithuania, and Paraguay.

India's inclusion in the programme was confirmed by FIFA after an initial application by the All India Football Federation (AIFF), which was followed by a detailed presentation of the commercial strategy and plans.

The programme will be held online from May to October 2026, the AIFF said. The course itself will be tailored by FIFA for the various stakeholders in women's football across the country.

"With AIFF now backed by a commercial partner, this programme will equip clubs with the tools and knowledge needed to build sustainable models, while also preparing them for the upcoming women's club licensing system that AFC (Asian Football Confederation) plans to introduce," the AIFF said in a release. —*PTI*

-PTI

MAIDAN CUP

Cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar cuts a cake during an event under the 'Maidan Cup' initiative, at Chhindnar village on Wednesday -*PTI*

Would be fantastic to have an Indian race: Alex

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

As India pushes to bring Formula One back to the country, Williams driver Alex Albon on Wednesday said a return would be "fantastic" and one he would be "excited" to be part of.

The Indian Grand Prix was held from 2011 to 2013 before being discontinued due to tax and bureaucratic hurdles. However, Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya is now pushing for F1 to return to India as soon as the 2027 season. "It would be fantastic to have an Indian race. I'll be excited to drive there. From what I've heard, there's been a big interest in F1 throughout India recently," Albon said in response to a PTI query. —*PTI*

Mbappe and Vinicius lift Real Madrid to a 2-1 win over Alaves

MADRID, 22 APRIL

Real Madrid's French forward #10 Kylian Mbappe challenges Alaves' Spanish goalkeeper -*X/@ REALMADRID*

Kylian Mbappé and Vinícius Júnior each scored as Real Madrid ended a four-game winless streak by defeating Alaves 2-1 on Tuesday night to move closer to Spanish league leader Barcelona.

The victory at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium left Madrid six points behind Barcelona, which hosts sixth-placed Celta Vigo on Wednesday.

It was Madrid's first game since it was eliminated by Bayern Munich in the quarterfinals of the Champions League. Madrid lost 2-1 at home and 4-3 in Germany in the second leg. The team's last two Spanish league matches had been a 1-1 home draw against Girona and a 2-1 loss at Mallorca.

"We have six games left," Madrid coach Álvaro Arbeloa said. "The goal is to win all of them, regardless of what happens. Every game counts."

It was a slow start for Madrid on Tuesday night, and the crowd at the Bernabeu looked anxious as Alaves had a few scoring chances early. Part of the fans jeered as the team struggled. There were some boos after the final whistle, as well as after Alaves scored late. Mbappé broke the deadlock in the 30th minute with a shot that deflected off an Alaves defender and fooled goalkeeper Antonio Sivera. Mbappé, the league's leading scorer with 24 goals, hadn't found the net in a league game since February.

Vinícius added to Madrid's lead with a long-range strike in the 50th. The Brazil forward hadn't scored in his last six games between club and country. He was among the players jeered by some of the fans before and during the match. After scoring, he raised his hands in a gesture apparently apologizing to the fans. —*PTI*

'HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS'

F1 stars under tax evasion investigation

ROME, 22 APRIL

The Italian financial investigation unit, Guardia di Finanza from Bologna, has launched a major inquiry into possible tax evasion involving foreign Formula 1 teams and their drivers.

The investigation focuses on earnings from recent grands prix at the Monza, Imola, and Mugello circuits.

Authorities suspect that the teams may have routinely failed to remit the required withholding tax, potentially resulting in hundreds of millions of euros in back taxes.

Under Italian tax law, Formula 1 drivers are classified as self-employed, while the teams they race for act as the withholding agents.

This arrangement requires teams to deduct a 'ritenuta alla fonte', a tax on the portion of salaries and sponsorship income directly linked to Italian events.

Although enforcement of this rule has been inconsistent in the past, the tax authorities are now demanding strict retroactive compliance for the period from 2020 to 2024.

The investigation has intensified following a formal complaint lodged last June by Bologna-based attorney Alessandro Mei.

His claim was built on preliminary findings by tax expert Emilio De Santis, whose work in 2020 even prompted questions in parliament.

"There is no doubt that athletes earning income in Italy, regardless of where they live, must declare and pay taxes in Italy," Mei explained. —*AGENCY*

Madrid Open 2026: Eala sails into second round

MADRID, 22 APRIL

Filipina star Alexandra Eala enjoyed a strong start to her Madrid Open campaign on Wednesday, moving past Russian qualifier Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-3, 6-3 to reach the second round at the event for the third-straight year.

The 44th-ranked lefty needed one hour and 31 minutes to dismiss Pavlyuchenkova, who was a semifinalist in the Spanish capital in 2021.

The 34-year-old Pavlyuchenkova, a former French Open runner-up currently ranked 116 in the world, is 0-6 in tour-level main draw matches so far this season. Eala saved all four break points she faced and broke Pavlyuchenkova twice in a tightly-contested 54-minute opening set. The 20-year-old phenom briefly lost her advantage in the second set but swept eight points in a row to regain her lead and book a clash with 19th seed Elise Mertens.

"I feel really great. I love Madrid, it's an amazing tournament," said Eala, who has been training at the Rafa Nadal Academy in Mallorca for almost eight years. —*PTI*